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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

VOL. 7 NO. 28 MARCH 1946

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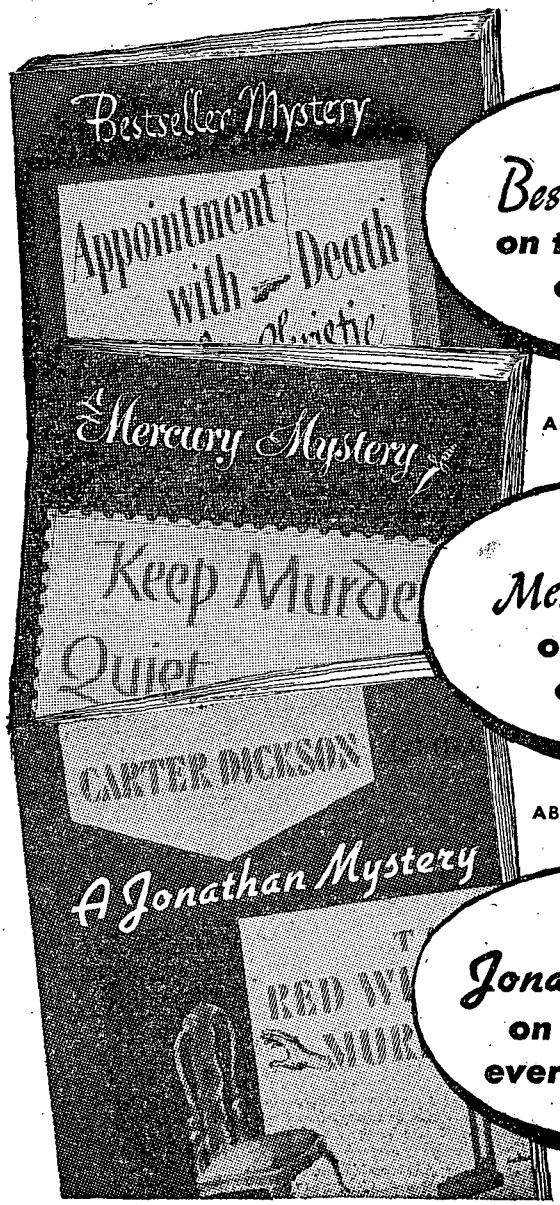

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CHALLENGE TO THE READER

Georges Simenon believes that there are "two distinct phases" in most murder cases. He describes this duality of detection in "The Guinguette by the Seine," in MAIGRET TO THE RESCUE, *published by Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1941:*

"[Maigret] had handled hundreds of cases in the course of his career, and he knew very well that the great majority of them could be divided into two distinct phases. The first consisted in the detective's making contact with a new atmosphere, with people of whose existence he had been unaware a few hours before, people who made a little world of their own, and whose little world had been suddenly shaken by the eruption of some drama. Enter the detective, a stranger if not an enemy, encountering hostile or suspicious glances on every hand. . . . This of course was the fascinating phase, at least for Maigret. The groping, probing phase, often without any real point of departure. A dozen different ways look equally hopeful — or hopeless. . . .

"And then suddenly a scent is picked up. Something real, something definite. And with that the second phase begins. The clutch is slipped in, the machinery starts turning, and the investigation proper, relentless and methodical, begins. Each step brings fresh facts to light. The detective is no longer alone with his problem. . . ."

The story that follows illustrates the Simenon theory in an unusual way. "Farewell to the Faulkners" — a worthy successor to Miriam Allen deFord's brilliant "Mortmain" and "Something to Do With Figures" — is both a detective and a crime story. The detective, however, is not the protagonist: he is simply a bystander, the deus ex machina who at the very end resolves the mystery. He is not the chief character, or even the focal point, of the tale. So, classifying "Farewell to the Faulkners" primarily as a mystery story, how can we still apply the Simenon analysis?

The truth is, every mystery story contains a detective, if not openly, then by implication. Even when there is no detective character in the story itself, there is still, paradoxically, a detective at work. That detective is the reader — YOU.

Some readers are not active detectives — they make no sustained attempt to solve the mystery. They read only for escape and entertainment, let the clues fall where they may, and take the final dénouement completely in stride. Other readers — the majority, we hope — play the game for all it's worth: they accept the author's challenge, match wits with him, demand scrupulous fairplay, and are in every sense detectives hot on the criminal's trail.

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Now, whether you happen to be one type of reader or another, we ask you to play detective in the case of the disappearing Faulkners. We ask you, even if it is not your usual 'tec habit, to try to solve the mystery Miss deFord has concocted. We ask you, paraphrasing Simenon's words, to emulate Maigret (and all the other great sleuths of fiction), by entering wholeheartedly into the first phase of a detective's job — making contact with a new atmosphere, with people of whose existence you were unaware a few minutes ago, people who have a world of their own and whose little world has been suddenly shaken by tragedy.

To Maigret (as to every other story-book detective) this is the fascinating phase. It should be equally fascinating to you. Like Maigret you will grope, probe, seek some clue, some break in the case, that will reveal the truth to your questing detectival mind.

At the proper point, after you have been given all the facts necessary to the solution, we shall stop the story and invite you to enter into the second phase of your inquisitive investigation. . . .

FAREWELL TO THE FAULKNERS

by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

Miss Harriet Faulkner never missed a Friday evening symphony concert. Riding home now in a taxi — only her brother Philip ever drove the roomy Faulkner car — she hummed a bit of Brahms to herself and reflected comfortably that really her life was as satisfactory a one as often falls to human lot. She had never missed love or marriage very much — both, she thought, were overrated; her parents had died so many years ago that now they were only a vague memory; she had always been reasonably well off; she had her music, to which she was devoted; and she had dear Caroline and dear Philip.

There were things about Caroline, of course, that Harriet deplored; chiefly her insensitivity to music — some of the dreadful noises that Caroline permitted to pour from the radio made her sister dash to her own room in dismay. Caroline was so set in her ways, too — always the same habits at the same hours, hardly ever leaving the house, having no life or interests outside of her home and her family; really, she was an old woman at sixty, whereas Harriet, only a year younger, still felt quite brisk and youthful. But take it all in all, Caroline was a darling, and Harriet was very happy with her.

Philip, their junior by sixteen and seventeen years respectively, seemed

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more like a nephew than a brother. He had been one of those unexpected babies who sometimes arrive long after the family is considered complete. Their mother had paid for his birth with her life, and three years later their father had followed her. Caroline and Harriet had devoted their youth to raising their young brother. And they had made a good job of it, Harriet reflected. It hadn't been easy, in the early years. Philip had been a rebellious child, resenting discipline. And as a youth he had had wild ideas. That dreadful ambition to go on the stage, for example; and that awful episode during his college days with that impossible girl, Mary Dwight, he had wanted to marry! But they had been firm, and the money was all theirs till Philip came of age, so in the end they had won. They had made Philip into a lawyer, as they had always intended to do. As for the girl —

Harriet shuddered slightly as an unwelcome memory assailed her — the only time she and Caroline had seen the person who for nearly twenty years had been known to them only as "that woman." Philip had dared to bring her home with him to meet his sisters. They had seen at once that she would never do. Tall, aggressive, brassy, with a strident voice — the last person in the world to take into their home — and of course they had never dreamt that Philip would leave the house. They had been so cool that the girl, for all her aplomb, had burst into tears and Philip had taken her away. That night they had made him promise on their mother's Bible that he would not see her again.

And then — why *was* she thinking of all those unpleasant things? The music must have stirred her more than she realized. Then, when Philip had been admitted to the bar, at twenty-five, he had floored them with the revelation that he had broken his solemn vow and married that woman — worse, that he had bought a house — in Woodacre, fortunately, not in the city — and intended to live there with her, and his sisters could like it or lump it.

Things had finally adjusted themselves, of course. Blood is thicker than water, after all. Philip kept his old room, and after a few years he spent half his time at home, leaving that creature alone in Woodacre, whether she liked it or not. Her name was never mentioned in the Faulkner house on Pacific Avenue, and of course they had never seen her again. It was a silent compromise, with Philip forgiven on strict conditions.

Except for that one lapse, he was a model brother now, and most dependable. For years they had not even had to worry about investment of their property. Philip, whose legal practice took up little of his time — he accepted nothing but civil suits and was fussy about those — managed everything for all of them.

The money, quite a sizable fortune though nothing stupendous, had been left by their father's will to his three

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children equally. Until Caroline became twenty-one, a bank had been the trustee. Then Caroline had the management, with the bank's guidance, for another year; after which Harriet came into her share, and they had managed Philip's property jointly for sixteen years more. As soon as Philip had been admitted to the bar, the whole business had been put in his hands by his sisters, who were glad to be rid of the worry of it. Since bills were always paid and there was always plenty in their drawing-accounts, they had discouraged Philip from even making annual reports. What was the use, when it really belonged to all of them and they all lived together?

Thinking idly of these matters, Harriet reached the big wooden gingerbread house on Pacific Avenue. Taxis drew up to the front door, of course; but when they used their own car, they drove it by the side-path to the rear garage, once a stable. The house was an anomaly. Three stories, basement, and attic, with turrets and cupolas and stained-glass windows, it was in the best style of the 1880's, and still stood in its own garden. The saplings dear father had planted were big shady trees now. On either side rose tall modernistic apartment houses. When the last Faulkner was gone, their house too would be torn down and another apartment house would take its place; but that would be a long time yet. Meanwhile, they were fortunate in still having their privacy. In both cases the sides of the apartment houses looking down upon them were pierced only by airshafts and narrow, lead-glassed bathroom windows: they could pretend at least that they lived in their own exclusive world.

The only difficulty nowadays was that servants balked at working in a house lacking so many modern improvements. But even so, they managed. They still had old William, who came daily to tend the garden and do the heavy work; and after a difficult interregnum they had Mamie back again. Mamie had come to them as cook after mother died. Then she had married: Caroline had offered to raise her pay to fantastic heights to dissuade her, but it had been useless. In the face of argument and prophecy, Mamie had insisted on abandoning them for her young policeman.

It was Harriet, worn out by an endless succession of surly and inefficient servants, who had traveled all the way to the Mission District and persuaded Mamie to come back to them. Caroline could never have accomplished it, Harriet sometimes thought smugly. When she was twenty-two, Harriet had been courted and proposed to. Her suitor had been rejected, of course; but since then Harriet had felt herself an authority on men. She had known, as Caroline would not have known, that Fred Mullins, not Mamie, was the stumbling-block. Mullins had just been promoted to the detective force, and he didn't want his wife working in another woman's kitchen. But he was also a soft-hearted Irishman, and Har-

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riet — small, fragile, and appealing for all her dignity — had won him over. Mamie could no longer "live in," naturally — she arrived at eight and left after preparing their dinner — but figuratively Harriet bore her home in triumph; and she was still with them, even though Fred Mullins by now was a full-fledged inspector on the homicide squad — indeed, a senior inspector, and very near the retirement age.

Yes, they managed very well. They never had guests, they seldom went out, and there were rooms they never went near except to dust them. Of late years Philip was there more than he had been at first. Harriet and Caroline could not imagine what he did in that ridiculous cottage in Woodacre, especially on weekends. Surely that woman's company could not be very entertaining. In college he had been something of an athlete, but though he was tall and strong still, he had never been one for hunting or fishing. Oh, well, as long as he kept his two lives separate, and was there when his sisters wanted him, Harriet could not complain.

"After all — men!" she sighed philosophically, as the taxi came to a stop.

She paid the driver crisply, carefully adding an exact ten per cent tip, and as he drove away reached into her handbag for the door key.

It was nearly half-past eleven, yet there were lights at the front windows, upstairs and down, as she could see well, even though the shades were drawn. Through the closed door she could hear a raucous female voice singing something horrible on Caroline's radio. What on earth had got into Caroline? Usually she was sound asleep by the time Harriet came back from the symphony.

Annoyed, Harriet inserted the key. It did not turn. She took it out and tried again. On an impulse, she turned the knob. It yielded: the door was unlocked. This was really too bad of Caroline — inexcusably careless.

Crossly, Harriet marched into the living room and snapped off the radio abruptly. In the sudden silence she called: "Caroline! Where are you, Caroline?" There was no answer.

Caroline's favorite chair was drawn up to the fireplace, as usual; her interminable knitting lay on the little table beside it. A book she had been reading — Caroline could knit and read at the same time — lay face downward on the seat of the chair.

Harriet sniffed. Something was burning. She hurried out to the lighted kitchen. Smoke was coming from a saucepan on the stove. Hastily Harriet turned off the gas and with a holder carried the hot saucepan to the sink. It contained the scorched residue of milk — Caroline's nightly boiled milk, which she drank every evening at nine-thirty.

Alarmed now, Harriet ran upstairs to her sister's room. It too was brightly lighted. Caroline's bed was turned down; her nightgown and dressing gown lay across it, her woolly slippers at its foot. But Caroline was not there.

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A thought struck Harriet. She ran back to the kitchen. Flopsy's bed was empty. Could Caroline have left the house to take Flopsy for his walk? It was Harriet's nightly task, but this evening it had been hard to find a taxi; and she had been later than usual. But would she have left the radio going and the milk cooking? Anyway, there was a faint yapping outside the kitchen door. Harriet opened it — it too was unlocked — and let in a cold and shivering poodle, quite alone.

Systematically Harriet searched the house. Somewhere Caroline must be lying ill. But the unlocked doors? As she searched she called, but no answer came. She entered every room, opened every closet, forced herself to the attic, the basement, the garden, with a flashlight. Still no Caroline.

Panic-stricken, back in the living room, Harriet forced herself into a chair and tried to think. Had Caroline suddenly gone insane and rushed out of the house? Had robbers broken in and kidnaped her? She ran to the front door again and looked wildly up and down the street. It was after midnight by now, and neither pedestrian nor car was in sight. It was a foggy, windy night, and very dark. Harriet shuddered at the thought of running about those silent streets, not knowing where to go or what to do. For a moment she even meditated phoning the police. But that was only a sign of terror. If something dreadful had happened to one of the Faulkners, it must be kept strictly to the Faulkners. No Faulkner yet had ever provided entertainment for the public on the front page of a newspaper.

There was only one thing left to do. Thank heaven Philip had a telephone in that Godforsaken cottage of his. She hated waking him, and dreaded hearing that woman's voice — she'd always been lucky so far on the few occasions when she had had to phone Philip there instead of at the office — but the time had come when even Harriet Faulkner could no longer cope with the situation. She needed a man.

The operator rang and rang, but there was no answer. Harriet nearly collapsed: had something happened to Philip too? And then, just as she was giving up in despair, his voice sounded.

"Who is it?" he demanded. "For heaven's sake, Harriet! We were sound asleep! What's the matter?"

She was almost incoherent, but by making her stop and speak slowly in short sentences, Philip finally managed to get the story. At first he made light of it.

"Good Lord, Harriet, nothing's wrong. There's probably some simple explanation. Maybe Caroline took Flopsy out for an airing and met somebody she knew and was detained. She'll be walking in any minute. What time is it, anyway? I went to bed early."

Harriet told him the time, and explained about Flopsy.

"Well — are you sure she hasn't fainted — isn't lying under the couch or something?"

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"I've been everywhere! I've looked in every corner — the garden too, and the garage. Oh, Philip, do you think I should call the police?"

Philip showed the instantaneous Faulkner reaction.

"No — not yet, anyway. Wait — I tell you what, Harriet, I'll get dressed and drive down. I can make it in a little over an hour."

"I hate to have you do it, dear, but —" In spite of all her efforts, Harriet's voice quavered.

"O.K., Harriet. Hold everything. Take a drink of that sherry of yours and keep calm. I'll be there as fast as I can — and if I find Caroline sitting there safe and sound, I'll tell her plenty! Chin up, Harriet; we'll laugh about this, all three of us, in the morning."

But they didn't laugh about it in the morning. All three of them never laughed about anything again. That was the last of Caroline Faulkner.

Harriet was prostrated, and glad to leave everything to Philip, who after all was a lawyer. Philip decided that this was not a matter for the police. Caroline, so far as they knew, had not been injured or killed; she had simply disappeared. Time enough for a public scandal if she should be found wandering somewhere, suffering from amnesia. The thing to do was to try to find her. He engaged a discreet agency, the Biggs Company, gave them all the data, and told them to spare no energy or cost. They worked hard and sent in a thumping bill; but after two months they had to give up the search. Some dozen wretched women, in no way resembling Caroline, had been tracked down and interviewed by Philip. Of Caroline herself there was no trace.

Time went on, and somehow Harriet and Philip adjusted themselves to existence without their sister. Old William, the handyman, had to be told, of course, and Mamie. But there were few acquaintances and no intimate family friends to worry about. Caroline had lived apart from even the small world of her sister, or the larger world of her brother. To the few casual inquiries, they answered vaguely that Caroline wasn't very well, or that she was out of town for a rest. Gradually the impression arose among the three or four persons who knew of Caroline's existence at all that she had probably lost her mind — you know how it is when those old families run to seed, my dear! — and was in a private home somewhere. Perhaps it would be more tactful not to mention her again. Nobody but Harriet and Philip really cared.

For a while Philip spent most of his nights with Harriet in the city, presumably leaving that woman to fare for herself in Woodacre. It was Harriet who, in an effort to be fair, suggested that he resume the way of life to which he was accustomed. She herself went out oftener now — to the theater and lectures and concerts and the opera — and she had not the slightest nervousness about coming home to an empty house, or spending the night

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alone in it. Tentatively Philip suggested a companion or secretary; but he might have known Harriet would poohpooh such an idea instantly. She wasn't a helpless old woman! He even broached the idea of asking the Mullinses to give up their flat and move to the big, half-used house; but Harriet, as he might have expected, was horrified.

"What! A stranger — a *policeman* — living here, in dear father's house! Why, Philip!"

Philip made no further recommendations.

"I'm perfectly all right," she said brightly over Friday breakfast, some six months later, "run along and come home soon again."

Philip looked relieved, in spite of himself.

"The place does need some work done on it," he muttered. Harriet sniffed.

Since he was forbidden to mention "that woman," he took refuge in describing the constant improvements he planned on his "estate." Recently he had had a barbed wire fence put all around his twenty acres, and had posted it with signs threatening trespassers. He wanted no hikers or hunters tearing down his bushes or trampling his undergrowth.

"Lucky to have had the wire for years — couldn't get it now," he explained to Harriet.

"Silly to bother," she said ungraciously.

He smiled rather stiffly as he kissed her goodbye. He would take the car downtown and drive straight up from the office, he said. Now that gas was rationed, he used the car very little, keeping it in the garage most of the time. And with a thirty-five mile speed limit, it took longer to go and come than it used to. But he wanted to get home before dark, to see to that fence. Harriet sniffed again.

This time it was Mamie who telephoned him, at eight o'clock on Saturday morning.

Except for changes arising from Harriet's different habits, the story was repeated. Mamie had come to work as usual, to find the front door unlocked, and lights on behind drawn shades in the living room and Harriet's bedroom. Harriet's reading glasses lay in the open book of Double-Crostics on which she had been working, and beside it stood a half-finished glass of sherry. Her bed also had been turned down and her night attire laid on it, but it had not been slept in. Flopsy was whining and scratching at the unlocked kitchen door.

Harriet herself was gone.

This was no case for the Biggs Company. Disliking it very much, Philip had to go to the police.

"And nobody lower than a captain would do him, the desk sergeant told me," Fred Mullins reported that night to his wife. " 'Tell your captain that Mr. Philip Faulkner wishes to speak to him,' says he, high and mighty, to O'Rourke."

"Oh, well now, Fred, it's distracted the poor man is, with the queer things

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happening to both my poor ladies," said Mamie pacifically. "And, after all, Mr. Philip's a big lawyer, and the Faulkners is big people."

"You and your Faulkners!" grumbled Fred. "I wonder I've let my wife work in someone's kitchen so long. It was the little one got around me, that time. Don't cry now, Mamie girl — I don't blame you for feelin' bad. I'm sorry meself, and if it turns out to be a matter for the squad, I'll do everything I can to help."

"For the homicide squad! What ever do you mean, Fred? Do you think poor Miss Harriet — and maybe Miss Caroline — was murdered?"

"And if not, where are they?" asked Mullins practically.

Which was practically the same thing Captain of Detectives Joyce had been saying to Philip earlier in the day. The captain was considerably annoyed.

"If you'd come to us six months ago —"

"I know, Captain. It's what I should have done. I know it as an attorney, even though I've never had any dealing with criminal cases. But my sister — both my sisters — are very conventional in their ideas. The mere thought of the family name — of our personal affairs — being made public — I guess," he laughed apologetically, "we Faulkners are rather an old-fashioned lot. Our father, you know, was a pretty prominent man; he —"

"Yes, yes, I know," said the captain brusquely. He dreaded, from sad experience, getting mixed up with any of what he called bitterly "that Pacific Heights crowd." "For the present," he added stiffly, "it will be kept a matter for the police department only. The papers will not be given anything by us."

"Thank you, Captain. After all, since no crime has been committed —"

"We don't know whether one has or not. That's what we're going to find out. And if it has, Mr. Faulkner, I might as well tell you that it will be treated exactly as if it had happened down on Skid Row."

"Oh, certainly — certainly," said Philip quickly. "I leave the whole thing in your competent hands."

But for all the department's best efforts, and the willing cooperation offered by Philip, the police were as baffled as the Biggs Company had been. They interviewed Philip and Mamie exhaustively; they analyzed the sherry; they fine-toothed the premises; they took fingerprints; they talked to everybody in both apartment houses next door. Not a single clue developed. It was simply a grotesque, bizarre happening, without explanation or meaning. Caroline and Harriet Faulkner, two commonplace elderly women, had vanished, six months apart. They were gone, and nobody could find out where or why.

For several weeks Philip spent every night in the house, with the lights on as if to welcome either or both of his sisters if they should return. When a month had passed without word of either of them, he came to a resolution.

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"I'm closing up the house, Mamie," he said. "You'll be glad enough to stay at home, after all these years. William will have no trouble finding a job, nowadays. I'll take Flopsy with me."

Worry had made Philip expansive. He went on, more to himself than to the old cook.

"I never thought I'd give up the family home. But after what's happened — it sounds superstitious, but it's hard not to feel there's a curse on this house."

"It is indeed, Mr. Philip. I feel the same way meself. What are you goin' to do — rent the house?"

Philip shuddered.

"I'm going to lock it up, just as it is, furniture and all, and let it stay that way. After all, Mamie, perhaps some day this — this mystery will be solved; Miss Caroline and Miss Harriet may come home again. If not — well, after the war I suppose it will have to be torn down. It's the last one-family house in the block."

He made his plans to close the house the next Wednesday. Until then, Mamie was to come daily as usual, while Philip stayed away from his office; and after a brief trip to Woodacre, he helped her pack his personal belongings and what few things he wanted to take with him, cover the furniture, and store Caroline's and Harriet's things in the attic.

"If you could get here a little early tomorrow morning, Mamie," he suggested on Tuesday evening. "The water and gas and electricity and telephone will be turned off soon, and there will be a lot of last-minute things to do before I leave."

"Sure, I'll be here by seven, Mr. Philip. And I'll make you a grand breakfast for the last one you eat in your own home. Curse or no curse, you must be sad to be going. I'm sad meself."

Indeed, Mamie was almost in tears. It was the end of many years' faithful service.

"That's good of you, Mamie," said Philip, touched. "And when you go, take everything from the pantry home with you. All I want is the basket we packed with the wine. And, Mamie — here's a little something for all your extra work this week, and all the years you've been our mainstay here."

"Oh, Mr. Philip!" Mamie took the envelope with a shaking hand. "God bless you, Mr. Philip! And if you want me to help out any time —"

"We'll be seeing each other, Mamie, don't worry. Run along now, and I'll be looking forward to that special breakfast."

"At seven sharp I'll be here, Mr. Philip."

Mamie hurried to catch her bus and get home before Fred came off duty. Philip looked with distaste at the living room, swathed in covers and no longer habitable. They had left the dining room and kitchen for the last. He ate the cold supper Mamie had left for him, put the dishes in the kitchen for her to wash in the morning, uncovered an armchair and dragged it in from the living room,

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and settled down by the dining-table. The secretary he shared with two other lawyers in a suite of offices downtown had telephoned him during the afternoon, and he had some notes to make and letters to write in connection with two or three pending cases.

Though ever since Harriet had vanished he had spent all his nights alone in what he had finally called a house with a curse on it, tonight it seemed emptier and gloomier than ever. Already it possessed the uneasy silence of an empty building. It was hard to put his mind to his work. At last he got up and went to the basket he had mentioned to Mamie. Among the bottles of sherry and port and burgundy was an unopened pint of brandy. Philip Faulkner drank very little, but tonight brandy was just what he needed. He opened the bottle, found a glass, drank a stiff jolt, and resolutely opened his brief-case and laid out the papers he needed. Flopsy was asleep in his bed in the kitchen.

It was poor Mamie again, hurrying in at seven, who found the doors unlocked, Flopsy in the garden, lights on in the empty living room, the dining room, and Philip's bedroom, his bed turned down and his pajamas and slippers by it, the dining-table scattered with legal papers, Philip's pen open on a half-finished note, the bottle and glass beside it — and no one in the chair.

No one in the house but herself. Philip Faulkner had followed his sisters.

This time Mamie phoned her husband. And Fred, telling her to wait there till someone came, took the matter immediately to Captain Joyce.

As soon as Mamie's story had been taken down, and she had gone home, weeping, with Flopsy in her arms, the house and grounds were searched thoroughly, and Philip's office was visited. Then the investigation moved on to Woodacre. There was no longer any question of keeping the affair out of the newspapers. Three mysterious disappearances in a prominent family — no clues — police (as usual) baffled — it was a lulu of a story. In three out of the four daily papers it shared the first page with the war news. There were no pictures available of Caroline or Harriet, but one was dug up of Philip from his college annual, and another from a group at some Civilian Defense function; and the house was photographed from every angle. "Is There a Curse on This House?" asked *The Morning Investigator* under a view of the front door — much to the embarrassment of the residents of the exclusive apartment houses on both sides. People came to stand and gape at the Faulkner home, and paid no attention whatever to the indignant doormen who tried to shoo them away.

The next morning, with a deputy sheriff in tow, since this was another county, Fred Mullins cut the barbed wire and trampled through Philip's cherished underbrush to his cottage.

"What kind of woman is this wife of his?" he asked Deputy Davis.

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Davis shook his head.

"I've lived here, man and boy, all my life, and darned if I ever saw her. Once in a while, before he put this fence up, kids passing through would get a glimpse of a woman's figure passing the window. He did all the shopping in the town — what he did; most of the stuff they used he brought from the city. When he was away she never set foot out of the house — leastwise, if she did, nobody saw her. Wish I could have my wife trained like that!"

"He's ashamed of her, that's what I gather from what my wife's told me — things she's overheard all these years. Probably married her when she was young and pretty, and the veneer wore off. These high-up snobs, that's the way they handle things, I guess."

"Folks here always figured she was maybe kind of — funny, and he wouldn't let her go out where people'd find it out."

"Well, here's where *we* find out. There's smoke coming from that chimney."

They banged on the door. After a few moments steps crossed the floor and the door opened.

The woman who stood there, looking with bewilderment and consternation at the two men confronting her, was tall and gaunt. Obviously she was an urban product, from her too-golden hair to her inappropriate high-heeled and open-toed shoes. Everything about her which would have gone unnoticed in a darkened cocktail bar — her hair, her lipstick, her mascara, her nail polish — glared grotesquely in her surroundings. The one thing she did not look like was what she was — practically a hermit in the country for a score of years.

"What is it? What do you want? Who are you?" she asked in a rapid staccato. Her voice was low and husky — again a voice for a cocktail bar, not for a cottage in the woods.

"We're the police, lady," announced Fred Mullins bluntly. She was a type he disliked at sight. "You Mrs. Faulkner? We're looking for your husband. Is he here?"

"Here? Philip? The police? What's wrong?"

"He's missin', that's what's wrong. Just like his sisters. Dead, maybe, all of 'em, for all we know."

She gave a little scream, and swayed on her high heels. The deputy sheriff pushed forward.

"We want to talk to you," he said. "Let's go in the house."

"Why, I never —" murmured the woman. But she backed into the room and Davis and Fred followed her.

"Sit down," Fred ordered. "We'll talk to you in a minute. We want to look around first."

The cottage contained only two rooms, with a kitchen alcove and a cubbyhole just big enough to hold a toilet and a shower. It needed only a glance to see that there was no one in it but the three of them. The woman had dropped into a chair and sat there stiffly, staring at them dazedly, occasionally licking her dry, too red lips.

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"Now, Mrs. Faulkner," Fred finished his brief inspection of the house and planted himself in a chair facing her. "Tell us all about it."

"I don't know what you mean," she said in that husky, rapid tone. "Where is Philip? What's happened to him?"

"That's what we want to know," said Fred grimly. "You know what happened to his sisters, don't you? Well, now it's happened to him too."

"You mean," she whispered, "that he's — disappeared?"

"They found the place yesterday, all open and lit up and just the way it was with the other two."

"Oh!"

"When did you see him last?" Davis put in.

"Not for nearly a month, except for one night last week. He said he was going to stay down there till his sister Harriet turned up or he got things settled. He — he phoned me last night, though. He said he'd be up tonight. And now you've come instead."

"You were pretty sore at those sisters of his, weren't you?" growled Fred Mullins. "You must have been pretty sore at him too, by this time, keeping you hidden like this — a woman like you."

"What are you driving at?" The woman's voice grew strident. "I never left this house — ask this man, if he's around here. Philip wouldn't let me. He wouldn't even let me answer the phone, even if he wasn't here, unless he told me when he was going to call me himself. It wasn't until last week that he left any money here for me — and that was for a special purpose. How could I have got away from here to — for anything?"

"You're talking a lot, lady. I guess you'd better come along with us."

"Oh, no!" she screamed. "Listen — I'll tell the truth! I wasn't ever going to, but if he's disappeared, then I must."

"O.K., talk. They're all dead, ain't they? Who killed them?"

Mrs. Faulkner struggled to regain her composure.

"I never saw those sisters, except once, years ago, before we were married. They wouldn't let me set foot again in that old cemetery vault they called a house — all I ever saw of it was the front parlor, and darned little of that. But I know they had Philip buffaloed — plenty. The only thing he ever did in his life against their will was to marry me. Unless you count taking all their money, of course," she added calmly.

"*What!*"

"Oh, yes, I found that out long ago. He had charge of their property, you know. I don't understand that kind of thing, myself, but one way or another he gradually got all their stocks or securities or whatever you call it into his hands. He'd say, 'Sign this — I'm selling this to buy you something better,' and old Caroline or Harriet would sign. He paid all their bills and he kept money in the bank for them to draw on. If either of them had ever asked for an accounting, the whole

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game would have been up, but he knew they never would.

"The only thing was, being so much older than he was, one of them might die any time — and then he'd be in the soup. They'd both left their money to each other, if you know what I mean, and then to him. 'After all, honey,' he used to say to me, 'it will all be mine some day — I'm just anticipating.' But of course it wouldn't have been as simple as that if one of them kicked the bucket.

"So some time along last year, when his sister Caroline had a spell with her heart and he was afraid she wasn't going to get over it, he made up his mind he didn't dare let either of them die a natural death. They had to disappear, for good, instead. Then in seven years, he figured, he could go to court and ask to have them declared legally dead, he said they call it."

"You mean to say he told you all this?" Davis demanded. "Why should he put his own safety in your hands?"

"Why, I'm his wife — I couldn't testify against him. He told me so."

"I see. And you were livin' on that money too, weren't you?" said Fred. "Well, then, what else did you find out?"

Her eyes widened in surprise.

"How he killed them, of course. And how he staged the disappearances."

"And how did he kill them?" demanded Fred.

"With — with his hands," she whispered. "His hands are awful strong. They thought he was up here, but he didn't go, either time. He just drove around till dark and then drove home, around back to that garage they had. And then he went in the house, where his sister was alone — first Caroline, and then Harriet — and I guess he said something like 'I didn't go to Woodacre after all,' and then suddenly he stepped behind her and put his thumbs on her neck and strangled her. They were little, both of them, you know.

"And then," she went on, "he carried the — he carried his sister out back through the kitchen, and put her in the baggage compartment of the car, and drove up here. He'd dug a — a place out here in the woods, out where I couldn't see from the house, and covered it up with leaves and stuff so it wouldn't show, and he put her in it and put the earth back and fixed it up with plants on it so nobody could tell.

"The first time, he was out doing — that, when he heard the phone ring. He just got here in time before it stopped ringing — like I told you, he never let me answer it. I got a black eye once for just trying to.

"With Harriet, it was the next morning before your wife rang, so he had time for a good sleep first," she concluded simply.

"Well, if you knew all this, even for a month," Davis exploded, "why in the name of heaven didn't you get out from under while he was away from here? Didn't you figure *you might be next?* You couldn't testify

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against him but it certainly wouldn't be healthy for him to have you around knowing all about it. Some time you might divorce him, and then where would he be? He must have been crazy in the first place to tell you, and you must have been crazy not to get out fast."

"But I wouldn't divorce him — why would I? I haven't any money of my own, and he'd never give me any alimony, would he, if I said anything against him? Besides, he's my husband — I love him."

Davis snorted and stood up.

"Well," he exclaimed, "I give up! I've heard everything now!"

"Sit down, Davis," said Fred mildly. "The lady's got more to tell us. Now, how about this disappearance of his? He staged that too, eh? What for, and where is he now?"

Mrs. Faulkner fished a pink handkerchief from some subterranean hiding place and held it to her eyes. Her voice broke.

"That's why I'm telling you," she sobbed. "He's dead. You'll never find him. He's at the bottom of the bay."

"How do you know that?"

"Because he told me. Last week, when he was up here. You say you can't understand why he told me all this. Why, mister, you've *got* to tell things! There's got to be somebody you can tell! You couldn't hold it all in — you'd go crazy. And who can you tell, if not your wife or husband?

"So he told me. And he was awful worried. He said, 'Honey, I got away with it once, but can I do it twice? It's all for you, honey,' he said, 'so we can be together always and they can't ever bother us again, and so there won't ever be any trouble about the money my father meant for me to have anyway. In a few years more I can claim they're dead and nobody will ever know there was anything wrong about the money.' I remember every word. 'I've always hated them,' he said, 'ever since I was a kid and they bossed me and wouldn't let me go on the stage the way I wanted, and tried to take you away from me. But it was all or nothing. It was neither of them or both. And this time I had to take it to the police. I knew I'd have to, but I'm worried.

" 'They took it all right,' he said, 'but that captain I talked to might be smarter than he looked. And there's a guy on the force I wish was retired from it; he knows the whole family and I wish he didn't. He's old, and he'll be out soon, but I couldn't wait. If he gets on the case, he might smell a rat.

" 'So, honey,' he said, 'let's put it this way. I think everything's going to be all right. But if anything happens that makes me think there's real danger, they'll never catch me alive. If you ever hear *I've* disappeared, you'll know what it means. I'll stage the same act I did with them, to keep the family from shame,' he said, 'but I'll go straight to the middle of the Golden Gate Bridge and jump off the way fifty people have done before me, where the current will take me out to sea, and they'll never find me.

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And you go East and change your name,' he said. That was when he gave me that money I said I had — enough to go East on."

Editor's Note

Well, how good a detective are you? Have you solved the mystery of the vanishing Faulkners? Do you believe Mrs. Faulkner's story that her husband was behind the whole business? Or, do you think Mrs. Faulkner is telling only part of the truth? — that Philip Faulkner is still alive, in hiding, waiting for the hue and cry to die down, so that he and Mrs. Faulkner can then go East together, with whatever is left of the family fortune? Or, do you think Mrs. Faulkner is lying on all counts? — that her husband did not kill his two sisters, that perhaps Mrs. Faulkner herself — but we are going too far. What is your *solution?*

The essential clue has been given to you. Did you spot it? The moment you did, the second phase of your detective work began. Like Maigret, you picked up the scent — something real, something definite at last. If you really know the truth, you have qualified as a fictional ferret of the first magnitude. You are in the company of Maigret, Holmes, Dupin — all the master manhunters. But you must be right *— your solution must be absolutely accurate, not vague or general or thereabouts.*

Now, read the rest of the story . . .

"And what were you going to live on when you got there?" asked Fred curiously.

"It's obvious, isn't it?" Davis broke in angrily. "She's not telling all she knows by a long sight. He's transferred his money somewhere and she knows where. And he's not dead, either, by my guess — he's waiting for her and she thinks she's going to go scot free after we've dug up the place here and found the bodies — if they *are* here. Well, she's not. She's an accessory after the fact, if nothing more, and since the murders were committed in your territory you can have her."

"No," agreed Fred quietly, "he's not dead. But she's not an accessory."

"Damn it, Mullins, I don't understand what you're talking about."

"This," said Fred. He looked thoughtfully at their witness. She was crying again, her face in her hands.

Fred leaned over, and almost gently he handcuffed her right wrist to his left one.

She pulled away violently and yelled.

"Come on, Davis," said the detective calmly. "Didn't you ever see anyone arrested for murder before?"

"Murder!" screamed Mrs. Faulkner. "Are you crazy? I never —"

"Tell me," Mullins asked, "what was your name before you were married?"

"Mary Dwight. Why —"

"And where's your marriage certificate?"

"How do I know? Somewhere."

"Maybe. I guess you're not a very good lawyer after all. Did you really think you could get away with this?"

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"I'm not a lawyer at all — my husband is — was. Oh, what are you talking about? Let me go!"

"If you're Mrs. Faulkner," snapped Fred Mullins sternly, "and you've never been familiar with that house, how did you know the garage was in back, through the kitchen?"

"He told me — he —"

"And if you never saw me before, and didn't know my name, *how did you know it was my wife telephoned when Miss Harriet disappeared?*"

"He —"

"Sure, there was a girl named Mary Dwight that Philip Faulkner went with. Maybe he married her — but if he did, I'll bet she's planted right here on this place with his sisters. My guess is he never married her."

"But *I'm* —"

"You're a good actor, Philip Faulkner: I give you that. But you're a bum lawyer, and I think you must be crazy: and crazy or not, you're a cold-blooded murderer. Better come quietly now. I'll have your own clothes sent to you in jail."

Editor's Note

Did you solve the mystery? There is only one correct solution — that there is no Mrs. Faulkner, that Mrs. Faulkner is really Philip Faulkner masquerading as his own wife. The clue that gave the whole show away? It was there, in full sight. How did the supposed Mrs. Faulkner know that it was Inspector Fred Mullins' wife who telephoned Philip the news of Miss Harriet's disappearance? Only if Philip had told her. But even so, how did she know that the woman who phoned Philip was the wife of the man now questioning her?

That was the crucial point. Mrs. Faulkner had never seen Inspector Mullins before and during his visit to the Faulkner cottage, he never once mentioned his name. Yet the supposed Mrs. Faulkner said to the man questioning her (on page 17, column 2, lines 32 and 33): "With Harriet, it was the next morning before your wife *rang . . ."*

If the "woman" calling herself Mrs. Faulkner were really Philip's wife, she could not possibly have made this statement; only someone who knew and recognized Inspector Mullins could have referred to another person as Mullins' wife; and that someone could only have been Philip Faulkner himself.

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The Continental Op in a pyrotechnicolor extravaganza: the Op versus Elvira with the flame-colored hair and the smoke-grey eyes; the Op versus Hook with the watery blue eyes and the pale freckles that turned green against a sallow face; the Op versus Tai with the yellow skin and the opaque black eyes. . . .

The odds were against the Continental Op that rainy afternoon in Turk Street — but what are odds to the Op? He's a long-shot lallapaloosa, that Continental Detective Agency man! Here is one of his earliest cases — when the Continental Op was only thirty-five — and a ripsnorter!

THE HOUSE IN TURK STREET

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

I HAD been told that the man for whom I was hunting lived in a certain Turk Street block, but my informant hadn't been able to give me his house number. Thus it came about that late one rainy afternoon I was canvassing this certain block, ringing each bell, and reciting a myth that went like this:

"I'm from the law office of Wellington and Berkeley. One of our clients — an elderly lady — was thrown from the rear platform of a street car last week and severely injured. Among those who witnessed the accident was a young man whose name we don't know. But we have been told that he lives in this neighborhood." Then I would describe the man I wanted, and wind up: "Do you know of anyone who looks like that?"

All down one side of the block the answers were:

"No," "No," "No."

I crossed the street and started on the other side. The first house: "No."

The second: "No."

The third. The fourth. The fifth —

No one came to the door in answer to my first ring. After a while, I rang again. I had just decided that no one was at home, when the knob turned slowly and a little old woman opened the door. She was a very fragile little old woman, with a piece of grey knitting in one hand, and faded eyes that twinkled pleasantly behind gold-rimmed spectacles. She wore a stiffly starched apron over a black dress.

"Good evening," she said in a thin friendly voice. "I hope you didn't mind waiting. I always have to peep out to see who's there before I open the door — an old woman's timidity."

"Sorry to disturb you," I apologized. "But —"

"Won't you come in, please?"

"No; I just want a little information. I won't take much of your time."

"I wish you would come in," she said, and then added with mock severity, "I'm sure my tea is getting cold."

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She took my damp hat and coat, and I followed her down a narrow hall to a dim room, where a man got up as we entered. He was old too, and stout, with a thin white beard that fell upon a white vest that was as stiffly starched as the woman's apron.

"Thomas," the little fragile woman told him; "this is Mr. —"

"Tracy," I said, because that was the name I had given the other residents of the block; but I came as near blushing when I said it as I have in fifteen years. These folks weren't made to be lied to.

Their name, I learned, was Quarre; and they were an affectionate old couple. She called him "Thomas" every time she spoke to him, rolling the name around in her mouth as if she liked the taste of it. He called her "my dear" just as frequently, and twice he got up to adjust a cushion more comfortably to her frail back.

I had to drink a cup of tea with them and eat some little spiced cookies before I could get them to listen to a question. Then Mrs. Quarre made little sympathetic clicking sounds with her tongue and teeth, while I told about the elderly lady who had fallen off a street car. The old man rumbled in his beard that it was "a damn shame," and gave me a fat cigar.

Finally I got away from the accident itself, and described the man I wanted.

"Thomas," Mrs. Quarre said; "isn't that the young man who lives in the house with the railing — the one who always looks so worried?"

The old man stroked his snowy beard and pondered for a moment.

"But, my dear," he rumbled at last; "hasn't he got dark hair?"

She beamed upon her husband.

"Thomas is *so* observant," she said with pride. "I had forgotten; but the young man I spoke of does have dark hair, so he couldn't be the one."

The old man then suggested that one who lived in the block below might be my man. They discussed this one at some length before they decided that he was too tall and too old. Mrs. Quarre suggested another. They discussed that one, and voted against him. Thomas offered a candidate; he was weighed and discarded. They chattered on.

Darkness settled. The old man turned on a light in a tall lamp that threw a soft yellow circle upon us, and left the rest of the room dim. The room was a large one, and heavy with the thick hangings and bulky horsehair furniture of a generation ago. I didn't expect to get any information here; but I was comfortable, and the cigar was a good one. Time enough to go out into the drizzle when I had finished my smoke.

Something cold touched the nape of my neck.

"Stand up!"

I didn't stand up: I couldn't. I was paralyzed. I sat and blinked at the Quarres.

And looking at them, I knew that something cold *couldn't* be against the back of my neck; a harsh voice *couldn't* have ordered me to stand up. It wasn't possible!

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Mrs. Quarre still sat primly upright against the cushions her husband had adjusted to her back; her eyes still twinkled with friendliness behind her glasses. The old man still stroked his white beard, and let cigar smoke drift unhurriedly from his nostrils.

They would go on talking about the young men in the neighborhood who might be the man I wanted. Nothing had happened. I had dozed.

"Get up!"

The cold thing against my neck jabbed deep into the flesh.

I stood up.

"Frisk him," the harsh voice came from behind.

The old man carefully laid his cigar down, came to me, and ran his hands over my body. Satisfied that I was unarmed, he emptied my pockets, dropping the contents upon the chair that I had just left.

"That's all," he told the man behind me, and returned to his chair.

"Turn around, you!" the harsh voice ordered.

I turned and faced a tall, gaunt, raw-boned man of about my own age, which is thirty-five. He had an ugly face — hollow-cheeked, bony, and spattered with big pale freckles. His eyes were of a watery blue, and his nose and chin stuck out abruptly.

"Know me?" he asked.

"No."

"You're a liar!"

I didn't argue the point; he was holding a gun in one big freckled hand.

"You're going to know me pretty well before you're through with me," this big ugly man threatened. "You're going to —"

"Hook!" a voice came from a portièred doorway — the doorway through which the ugly man had no doubt crept up behind me. "Hook, come here!"

The voice was feminine — young, clear, and musical.

"What do you want?" the ugly man called over his shoulder.

"*He's* here."

"All right!" He turned to Thomas Quarre. "Keep this joker safe."

From somewhere among his whiskers, his coat, and his stiff white vest, the old man brought out a big black revolver, which he handled with no signs of unfamiliarity.

The ugly man swept up the things that had been taken from my pockets, and carried them through the portières with him.

Mrs. Quarre smiled up at me.

"Do sit down, Mr. Tracy," she said.

I sat.

Through the portières a new voice came from the next room; a drawling baritone voice whose accent was unmistakably British; cultured British.

"What's up, Hook?" this voice was asking.

The harsh voice of the ugly man:

"Plenty's up, I'm telling you! They're on to us! I started out a while ago; and as soon as I got to the street, I seen a man I knowed on the other side. He was pointed out to me in Philly five-six years ago. I don't know his name, but I remembered his mug — he's a Continental Detective Agency

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man. I came back in right away, and me and Elvira watched him out of the window. He went to every house on the other side of the street, asking questions or something. Then he came over and started to give this side a whirl, and after a while he rings the bell. I tell the old woman and her husband to get him in, stall him along, and see what he says for himself. He's got a song and dance about looking for a guy what seen an old woman bumped by a street car — but that's the bunk! He's gunning for us. There ain't nothing else to it. I went in and stuck him up just now. I meant to wait till you come, but I was scared he'd get nervous and beat it."

The British voice: "You shouldn't have shown yourself to him. The others could have taken care of him."

Hook: "What's the diff? Chances is he knows us all anyway. But supposing he didn't, what diff does it make?"

The drawling British voice: "It may make a deal of difference. It was stupid."

Hook, blustering: "Stupid, huh? You're always bellyaching about other people being stupid. To hell with you, I say! Who does all the work? Who's the guy that swings all the jobs? Huh? Where —"

The young feminine voice: "Now, Hook, for God's sake don't make that speech again. I've listened to it until I know it by heart!"

A rustle of papers, and the British voice: "I say, Hook, you're correct about his being a detective. Here is an identification card among his things."

The feminine voice from the next room: "Well, what's to be done? What's our play?"

Hook: "That's easy to answer. We're going to knock this sleuth off first!"

The feminine voice: "And put our necks in the noose?"

Hook, scornfully: "As if they ain't there if we don't! You don't think this guy ain't after us for the L. A. job, do you?"

The British voice: "You're an ass, Hook, and a quite hopeless one. Suppose this chap is interested in the Los Angeles affair, as is probable; what then? He is a Continental operative. Is it likely that his organization doesn't know where he is? Don't you think they know he was coming up here? And don't they know as much about us — chances are — as he does? There's no use killing him. That would only make matters worse. The thing to do is to tie him up and leave him here. His associates will hardly come looking for him until tomorrow."

My gratitude went out to the British voice! Somebody was in my favor, at least to the extent of letting me live. I hadn't been feeling very cheerful these last few minutes. Somehow, the fact that I couldn't see these people who were deciding whether I was to live or die, made my plight seem all the more desperate. I felt better now, though far from gay; I had confidence in the drawling British voice; it was the voice of a man who habitually carries his point.

Hook, bellowing: "Let me tell you something, brother: that guy's going

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to be knocked off! That's flat! I'm taking no chances. You can jaw all you want to about it, but I'm looking out for my own neck and it'll be a lot safer with that guy where he can't talk. That's flat."

The feminine voice, disgustedly: "Aw, Hook, be reasonable!"

The British voice, still drawling, but dead cold: "There's no use reasoning with you, Hook, you've the instincts and the intellect of a troglodyte. There is only one sort of language that you understand; and I'm going to talk that language to you, my son. If you are tempted to do anything silly between now and the time of our departure, just say this to yourself two or three times: 'If he dies, I die.' Say it as if it were out of the Bible — because it's that true."

There followed a long space of silence, with a tenseness that made my not particularly sensitive scalp tingle.

When, at last, a voice cut the silence, I jumped as if a gun had been fired; though the voice was low and smooth enough.

It was the British voice, confidently victorious, and I breathed again.

"We'll get the old people away first," the voice was saying. "You take charge of our guest, Hook. Tie him up while I get the bonds, and we'll be gone in less than half an hour."

The portières parted and Hook came into the room — a scowling Hook whose freckles had a greenish tinge against the sallowness of his face. He pointed a revolver at me, and spoke to the Quarres, short and harsh:

"He wants you."

They got up and went into the next room.

Hook, meanwhile, had stepped back to the doorway, still menacing me with his revolver; and pulled loose the plush ropes that were around the heavy curtains. Then he came around behind me, and tied me securely to the highbacked chair; my arms to the chair's arms, my legs to the chair's legs, my body to the chair's back and seat; and he wound up by gagging me with the corner of a cushion that was too well-stuffed for my comfort.

As he finished lashing me into place, and stepped back to scowl at me, I heard the street door close softly, and then light footsteps ran back and forth overhead.

Hook looked in the direction of those footsteps, and his little watery blue eyes grew cunning.

"Elvira!" he called softly.

The portières bulged as if someone had touched them, and the musical feminine voice came through.

"What?"

"Come here."

"I'd better not. He wouldn't —"

"Damn him!" Hook flared up. "Come here!"

She came into the room and into the circle of light from the tall lamp; a girl in her early twenties, slender and lithe, and dressed for the street, except that she carried her hat in one hand. A white face beneath a bobbed mass of flame-colored hair. Smoke-grey eyes that were set too far apart

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for trustworthiness — though not for beauty — laughed at me; and her red mouth laughed at me, exposing the edges of little sharp animal-teeth. She was beautiful; as beautiful as the devil, and twice as dangerous.

She laughed at me — a fat man all trussed up with red plush rope, and with the corner of a green cushion in my mouth — and she turned to the ugly man.

"What do you want?"

He spoke in an undertone, with a furtive glance at the ceiling, above which soft steps still padded back and forth.

"What say we shake him?"

Her smoke-grey eyes lost their merriment and became calculating.

"There's a hundred thousand he's holding — a third of it's mine. You don't think I'm going to take a Mickey Finn on that, do you?"

"Course not! Supposing we wet the hundred-grand?"

"How?"

"Leave it to me, kid; leave it to me! If I swing it, will you go with me? You know I'll be good to you."

She smiled contemptuously, I thought — but he seemed to like it.

"You're whooping right you'll be good to me," she said. "But listen, Hook: we couldn't get away with it — not unless you *get him*. I know him! I'm not running away with anything that belongs to him unless he is fixed so that he can't come after it."

Hook moistened his lips and looked around the room at nothing. Apparently he didn't like the thought of tangling with the owner of the British drawl. But his desire for the girl was too strong for his fear.

"I'll do it!" he blurted. "I'll get him! Do you mean it, kid? If I get him, you'll go with me?"

She held out her hand.

"It's a bet," she said, and he believed her.

His ugly face grew warm and red and utterly happy, and he took a deep breath and straightened his shoulders. In his place, I might have believed her myself — all of us have fallen for that sort of thing at one time or another — but sitting tied up on the side-lines, I knew that he'd have been better off playing with a gallon of nitro than with this baby. She was dangerous! There was a rough time ahead for Hook!

"This is the lay —" Hook began, and stopped, tongue-tied.

A step had sounded in the next room.

Immediately the British voice came through the portières, and there was exasperation to the drawl now:

"This is really too much! I can't" — he said *reahly* and *cawnt* — "leave for a moment without having things done all wrong. Now just what got into you, Elvira, that you must go in and exhibit yourself to our detective?"

Fear flashed into her smoke-grey eyes, and out again, and she spoke airily.

"Don't be altogether yellow," she said. "Your precious neck can get along all right without so much guarding."

The portières parted, and I twisted

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my head around as far as I could get it for my first look at this man who was responsible for my still being alive. I saw a short fat man, hatted and coated for the street, and carrying a tan traveling bag in one hand.

Then his face came into the yellow circle of light, and I saw that it was a Chinese face. A short fat Chinese, immaculately clothed in garments that were as British as his accent.

"It isn't a matter of color," he told the girl — and I understood now the full sting of her jibe; "it's simply a matter of ordinary wisdom."

His face was a round yellow mask, and his voice was the same emotionless drawl that I had heard before; but I knew that he was as surely under the girl's sway as the ugly man — or he wouldn't have let her taunt bring him into the room. But I doubted that she'd find this Anglicized oriental as easily handled as Hook.

"There was no particular need," the Chinese was still talking, "for this chap to have seen any of us." He looked at me now for the first time, with little opaque eyes that were like two black seeds. "It's quite possible that he didn't know any of us, even by description. This showing ourselves to him is the most arrant sort of nonsense."

"Aw, hell, Tai!" Hook blustered. "Quit your bellyaching, will you? What's the diff? I'll knock him off, and that takes care of that!"

The Chinese set down his tan bag and shook his head.

"There will be no killing," he drawled, "or there will be quite a bit of killing. You don't mistake my meaning, do you, Hook?"

Hook didn't. His Adam's-apple ran up and down with the effort of his swallowing and behind the cushion that was choking me, I thanked the yellow man again.

Then this red-haired she-devil put her spoon in the dish.

"Hook's always offering to do things that he has no intention of doing," she told the Chinese.

Hook's ugly face blazed red at this reminder of his promise to *get* the Chinese, and he swallowed again, and his eyes looked as if nothing would have suited him better than an opportunity to crawl under something. But the girl had him; her influence was stronger than his cowardice.

He suddenly stepped close to the Chinese, and from his advantage of a full head in height scowled down into the round yellow face.

"Tai," the ugly man snarled; "you're done. I'm sick and tired of all this dog you put on — acting like you was a king or something. I'm going to —"

He faltered, and his words faded away into silence. Tai looked up at him with eyes that were as hard and black and inhuman as two pieces of coal. Hook's lips twitched and he flinched away a little.

I stopped sweating. The yellow man had won again. But I had forgotten the red-haired she-devil.

She laughed now — a mocking laugh that must have been like a knife to the ugly man.

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A bellow came from deep in his chest, and he hurled one big fist into the round blank face of the yellow man.

The force of the punch carried Tai all the way across the room, and threw him on his side in one corner.

But he had twisted his body around to face the ugly man even as he went hurtling across the room — a gun was in his hand before he went down — and he was speaking before his legs had settled upon the floor — and his voice was a cultured British drawl.

"Later," he was saying; "we will settle this thing that is between us. Just now you will drop your pistol and stand very still while I get up."

Hook's revolver — only half out of his pocket when the oriental had covered him — thudded to the rug. He stood rigidly still while Tai got to his feet, and Hook's breath came out noisily, and each freckle stood ghastlily out against the dirty scared white of his face.

I looked at the girl. There was contempt in the eyes with which she looked at Hook, but no disappointment.

Then I made a discovery: *something had changed in the room near her!*

I shut my eyes and tried to picture that part of the room as it had been before the two men had clashed. Opening my eyes suddenly, I had the answer.

On the table beside the girl had been a book and some magazines. They were gone now. Not two feet from the girl was the tan bag that Tai had brought into the room. Suppose the bag had held the bonds from the Los Angeles job that they had mentioned. It probably had. What then? It probably now held the book and magazines that had been on the table! The girl had stirred up the trouble between the two men to distract their attention while she made a switch. Where would the loot be, then? I didn't know, but I suspected that it was too bulky to be on the girl's slender person.

Just beyond the table was a couch, with a wide red cover that went all the way down to the floor. I looked from the couch to the girl. She was watching me, and her eyes twinkled with a flash of mirth as they met mine coming from the couch. The couch it was!

By now the Chinese had pocketed Hook's revolver, and was talking to him:

"If I hadn't a dislike for murder, and if I didn't think that you will perhaps be of some value to Elvira and me in effecting our departure, I should certainly relieve us of the handicap of your stupidity now. But I'll give you one more chance. I would suggest, however, that you think carefully before you give way to any more of your violent impulses." He turned to the girl. "Have you been putting foolish ideas in our Hook's head?"

She laughed.

"Nobody could put any kind in it."

"Perhaps you're right," he said, and then came over to test the lashings about my arms and body.

Finding them satisfactory, he picked

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up the tan bag, and held out the gun he had taken from the ugly man a few minutes before.

"Here's your revolver, Hook, now try to be sensible. We may as well go now. The old man and his wife will do as they were told. They are on their way to a city that we needn't mention by name in front of our friend here, to wait for us and their share of the bonds. Needless to say, they will wait a long while — they are out of it now. But between ourselves there must be no more treachery. If we're to get clear, we must help each other."

According to the best dramatic rules, these folks should have made sarcastic speeches to me before they left, but they didn't. They passed me without even a farewell look, and went out of sight into the darkness of the hall.

Suddenly the Chinese was in the room again, running tiptoe — an open knife in one hand, a gun in the other. This was the man I had been thanking for saving my life!

He bent over me.

The knife moved on my right side, and the rope that held that arm slackened its grip. I breathed again, and my heart went back to beating.

"Hook will be back," Tai whispered, and was gone.

On the carpet, three feet in front of me, lay a revolver.

The street door closed, and I was alone in the house for a while.

You may believe that I spent that while struggling with the red plush ropes that bound me. Tai had cut one length, loosening my right arm somewhat and giving my body more play, but I was far from free. And his whispered "Hook will be back" was all the spur I needed to throw my strength against my bonds.

I understood now why the Chinese had insisted so strongly upon my life being spared. *I was the weapon with which Hook was to be removed!* The Chinese figured that Hook would make some excuse as soon as they reached the street, slip back into the house, knock me off, and rejoin his confederates. If he didn't do it on his own initiative, I suppose the Chinese would suggest it.

So he had put a gun within reach and had loosened my ropes as much as he could, not to have me free before he himself got away.

This thinking was a side-issue. I didn't let it slow up my efforts to get loose. The *why* wasn't important to me just now — the important thing was to have that revolver in my hand when the ugly man came back.

Just as the front door opened, I got my right arm completely free, and plucked the strangling cushion from my mouth. The rest of my body was still held by the ropes — held loosely — but held.

I threw myself, chair and all, forward, breaking the fall with my free arm. The carpet was thick. I went down on my face, with the heavy chair atop me, all doubled up, but my right arm was free of the tangle, and my right hand grasped the gun.

The dim light hit upon a man hurry-

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ing into the room — a glint of metal in his hand.

I fired.

He caught both hands to his belly, bent double, and slid out across the carpet.

That was over. But that was far from being all. I wrenched at the plush ropes that held me, while my mind tried to sketch what lay ahead.

The girl had switched the bonds, hiding them under the couch — there was no question of that. She had intended coming back for them before I had time to get free. But Hook had come back first, and she would have to change her plan. What more likely than that she would now tell the Chinese that Hook had made the switch? What then? There was only one answer: Tai would come back for the bonds — both of them would come. Tai knew that I was armed now, but they had said that the bonds represented a hundred thousand dollars. That would be enough to bring them back!

I kicked the last rope loose and scrambled to the couch. The bonds were beneath it: four thick bundles, done up with heavy rubber bands. I tucked them under one arm, and went over to the man who was dying near the door. His gun was under one of his legs. I pulled it out, stepped over him, and went into the dark hall.

Then I stopped to consider.

The girl and the Chinese would split to tackle me. One would come in the front door and the other in the rear. That would be the safest way for them to handle me. My play, obviously, was to wait just inside one of those doors for them. It would be foolish for me to leave the house. That's exactly what they would be expecting at first — and they would be lying in ambush.

Decidedly, my play was to lie low within sight of this front door and wait until one of them came through it — as one of them surely would, when they had tired of waiting for me to come out.

Toward the street door, the hall was lighted with the glow that filtered through the glass from the street lights. The stairway leading to the second-story threw a triangular shadow across part of the hall — a shadow that was black enough for any purpose. I crouched low in this three-cornered slice of night, and waited.

I had two guns: the one the Chinese had given me, and the one I had taken from Hook. I had fired one shot; that would leave me eleven still to use — unless one of the weapons had been used since it was loaded. I broke the gun Tai had given me, and in the dark ran my fingers across the back of the cylinder. My fingers touched *one* shell — under the hammer. Tai had taken no chances; he had given me one bullet — the bullet with which I had dropped Hook.

I put that gun down on the floor, and examined the one I had taken from Hook. It was *empty*. The Chinese had taken no chances at all! He had emptied Hook's gun before returning it to him after their quarrel.

I was in a hole! Alone, unarmed,

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in a strange house that would presently hold two who were hunting me — and that one of them was a woman didn't soothe me any — she was none the less deadly on that account.

For a moment I was tempted to make a dash for it; the thought of being out in the street again was pleasant; but I put the idea away. That would be foolishness, and plenty of it. Then I remembered the bonds under my arm. They would have to be my weapon; and if they were to serve me, they would have to be concealed.

I slipped out of my triangular shadow and went up the stairs. Thanks to the street lights, the upstairs rooms were not too dark for me to move around. Around and around I went through the rooms, hunting for a place to hide the bonds. But when suddenly a window rattled, as if from the draught created by the opening of an outside door somewhere, I still had the loot in my hands.

There was nothing to do now but to chuck them out of a window and trust to luck. I grabbed a pillow from a bed, stripped off the white case, and dumped the bonds into it. Then I leaned out of an already open window and looked down into the night, searching for a desirable dumping place; I didn't want the bonds to land on anything that would make a racket.

And, looking out of the window, I found a better hiding-place. The window opened into a narrow court, on the other side of which was a house of the same sort as the one I was in. That house was of the same height as this one, with a flat tin roof that sloped down the other way. The roof wasn't far from me — not too far to chuck the pillow-case. I chucked it. It disappeared over the edge of the roof and crackled softly on the tin.

Then I turned on all the lights in the room, lighted a cigarette (we all like to pose a little now and then), and sat down on the bed to await my capture. I might have stalked my enemies through the dark house, and possibly have nabbed them; but most likely I would simply have succeeded in getting myself shot. And I don't like to be shot.

The girl found me.

She came creeping up the hall, an automatic in each hand, hesitated for an instant outside the door, and then came in on the jump. And when she saw me sitting peacefully on the side of the bed, her eyes snapped scornfully at me, as if I had done something mean. I suppose she thought I should have given her an opportunity to shoot.

"I got him, Tai," she called, and the Chinese joined us.

"What did Hook do with the bonds?" he asked point blank.

I grinned into his round yellow face and led my ace.

"Why don't you ask the girl?"

His face showed nothing, but I imagined that his fat body stiffened a little within its fashionable British clothing. That encouraged me, and I went on with my little lie that was meant to stir things up.

"Haven't you rapped to it," I

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asked; "that they were fixing up to ditch you?"

"You dirty liar!" the girl screamed, and took a step toward me.

Tai halted her with an imperative gesture. He stared through her with his opaque black eyes, and as he stared the blood slid out of her face. She had this fat yellow man on her string, right enough, but he wasn't exactly a harmless toy.

"So that's how it is?" he said slowly, to no one in particular. Then to me: "Where did they put the bonds?"

The girl went close to him and her words came out tumbling over each other:

"Here's the truth of it, Tai, so help me God! I switched the stuff myself. Hook wasn't in it. I was going to run out on both of you. I stuck them under the couch downstairs, but they're not there now. That's the God's truth!"

He was eager to believe her, and her words had the ring of truth to them. And I knew that — in love with her as he was — he'd more readily forgive her treachery with the bonds than he would forgive her for planning to run off with Hook; so I made haste to stir things up again.

"Part of that is right enough," I said. "She did stick the bonds under the couch — but Hook was in on it. They fixed it up between them while you were upstairs. He was to pick a fight with you, and during the argument she was to make the switch, and that is exactly what they did."

I had him!

As she wheeled savagely toward me, he stuck the muzzle of an automatic in her side — a smart jab that checked the angry words she was hurling at me.

"I'll take your guns, Elvira," he said, and took them.

"Where are the bonds now?" he asked me.

I grinned. "I'm not with you, Tai. I'm against you."

"I don't like violence," he said slowly, "and I believe you are a sensible person. Let us traffic, my friend."

"You name it," I suggested.

"Gladly! As a basis for our bargaining, we will stipulate that you have hidden the bonds where they cannot be found by anyone else; and that I have you completely in my power, as the shilling shockers used to have it."

"Reasonable enough," I said; "go on."

"The situation, then, is what gamblers call a standoff. Neither of us has the advantage. As a detective, you want us; but we have you. As thieves, we want the bonds; but you have them. I offer you the girl in exchange for the bonds, and that seems to me an equitable offer. It will give me the bonds and a chance to get away. It will give you no small degree of success in your task as a detective. Hook is dead. You will have the girl. All that will remain is to find me and the bonds again — by no means a hopeless task. You will have turned a defeat into half a victory, with an excellent chance to make it a complete one."

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"How do I know that you'll give me the girl?"

He shrugged. "Naturally, there can be no guarantee. But, knowing that she planned to desert me for the swine who lies dead below, you can't imagine that my feelings for her are the most friendly. Too, if I take her with me, she will want a share in the loot."

I turned the lay-out over in my mind.

"This is the way it looks to me," I told him at last. "You aren't a killer. I'll come through alive no matter what happens. All right; why should I swap? You and the girl will be easier to find again than the bonds, and they are the most important part of the job anyway. I'll hold on to them, and take my chances on finding you folks again. Yes, I'm playing it safe."

"No, I'm not a killer," he said, very softly; and he smiled the first smile I had seen on his face. It wasn't a pleasant smile: and there was something in it that made you want to shudder. "But I am other things, perhaps, of which you haven't thought. But this talking is to no purpose. Elvira!"

The girl came obediently forward.

"You will find sheets in one of the bureau drawers," he told her. "Tear one or two of them into strips strong enough to tie up our friend securely."

The girl went to the bureau. I wrinkled my head, trying to find a not too disagreeable answer to the question in my mind. The answer that came first wasn't nice: *torture*.

Then a faint sound brought us all into tense motionlessness.

The room we were in had two doors: one leading into the hall, the other into another bedroom. It was through the hall door that the faint sound had come — the sound of creeping feet.

Swiftly, silently, Tai moved backward to a position from which he could watch the hall door without losing sight of the girl and me — and the gun poised like a live thing in his fat hand was all the warning we needed to make no noise.

The faint sound again, just outside the door.

The gun in Tai's hand seemed to quiver with eagerness.

Through the other door — the door that gave to the next room — popped Mrs. Quarre, an enormous cocked revolver in her thin hand.

"Let go it, you nasty heathen," she screeched.

Tai dropped his pistol before he turned to face her, and he held his hands up high — all of which was very wise.

Thomas Quarre came through the hall door then; he also held a cocked revolver — the mate of his wife's — though, in front of his bulk, his didn't look so enormously large.

I looked at the old woman again, and found little of the friendly fragile one who had poured tea and chatted about the neighbors. This was a witch if there ever was one — a witch of the blackest, most malignant sort. Her little faded eyes were sharp with ferocity, her withered lips were taut in a wolfish snarl, and her thin body fairly quivered with hate.

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"I knew it," she was shrilling. "I told Tom as soon as we got far enough away to think things over. I knew it was a frame-up! I knew this supposed detective was a pal of yours! I knew it was just a scheme to beat Thomas and me out of our shares! Well, I'll show you, you yellow monkey! Where are them bonds? Where are they?"

The Chinese had recovered his poise, if he had ever lost it.

"Our stout friend can tell you perhaps," he said. "I was about to extract the information from him when you so — ah — dramatically arrived."

"Thomas, for goodness sakes don't stand there dreaming," she snapped at her husband, who to all appearances was still the same mild old man who had given me an excellent cigar. "Tie up this Chinaman! I don't trust him an inch, and I won't feel easy until he's tied up."

I got up from my seat on the side of the bed, and moved cautiously to a spot that I thought would be out of the line of fire if the thing I expected happened.

Tai had dropped the gun that had been in his hand, but he hadn't been searched. The Chinese are a thorough people; if one of them carries a gun at all, he usually carries two or three or more. One gun had been taken from Tai, and if they tried to truss him up without frisking him, there was likely to be fireworks. So I moved to one side.

Fat Thomas Quarre went phlegmatically up to the Chinese to carry out his wife's orders — and bungled the job perfectly.

He put his bulk between Tai and the old woman's gun.

Tai's hands moved.

An automatic was in each.

Once more Tai ran true to racial form. When a Chinese shoots, he keeps on until his gun is empty.

When I yanked Tai over backward by his fat throat, and slammed him to the floor, his guns were still barking metal; and they clicked empty as I got a knee on one of his arms. I didn't take any chances. I worked on his throat until his eyes and tongue told me that he was out of things for a while.

Then I looked around.

Thomas Quarre was against the bed, plainly dead, with three round holes in his starched white vest.

Across the room, Mrs. Quarre lay on her back. Her clothes had somehow settled in place around her fragile body, and death had given her once more the gentle friendly look she had worn when I first saw her.

The red-haired girl Elvira was gone.

Presently Tai stirred, and after taking another gun from his clothes, I helped him sit up. He stroked his bruised throat with one fat hand, and looked coolly around the room.

"Where's Elvira?" he asked.

"Got away — for the time being."

He shrugged.

"Well, you can call it a decidedly successful operation. The Quarres and Hook dead; the bonds and I in your hands."

"Not so bad," I admitted, "but will you do me a favor?"

"If I may."

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"Tell me what the hell this is all about!"

"All about?" he asked.

"Exactly! From what you people have let me overhear, I gather that you pulled some sort of job in Los Angeles that netted you a hundred-thousand-dollars' worth of bonds; but I can't remember any recent job of that size down there."

"Why, that's preposterous!" he said with what, for him, was almost wild-eyed amazement. "Preposterous! Of course you know all about it!"

"I do not! I was trying to find a young fellow named Fisher who left his Tacoma home in anger a week or two ago. His father wants him found on the quiet, so that he can come down and try to talk him into going home again. I was told that I might find Fisher in this block of Turk Street, and that's what brought me here."

He didn't believe me. He never believed me. He went to the gallows thinking me a liar.

When I got out into the street again (and Turk Street was a lovely place when I came free into it after my evening in that house!) I bought a newspaper that told me most of what I wanted to know.

A boy of twenty — a messenger in the employ of a Los Angeles stock and bond house — had disappeared two days before, while on his way to a bank with a wad of bonds. That same night this boy and a slender girl with bobbed red hair had registered at a hotel in Fresno as *J. M. Riordan and wife*. The next morning the boy had been found in his room — murdered. The girl was gone. The bonds were gone.

That much the paper told me. During the next few days, digging up a little here and a little there, I succeeded in piecing together most of the story.

The Chinese — whose full name was Tai Choon Tau — had been the brains of the mob. Their game had been a variation of the always-reliable badger game. Tai would pick out some youth who was messenger or runner for a banker or broker — one who carried either cash or negotiable securities in large quantities.

The girl Elvira would then *make* this lad, get him all fussed up over her — which shouldn't have been very hard for her — and then lead him gently around to running away with her and whatever he could grab in the way of his employer's bonds or currency.

Wherever they spent the first night of their flight, there Hook would appear — foaming at the mouth and loaded for bear. The girl would plead and tear her hair and so forth, trying to keep Hook — in his rôle of irate husband — from butchering the youth. Finally she would succeed, and in the end the youth would find himself without either girl or the fruits of his thievery.

Sometimes he had surrendered to the police. Two we found had committed suicide. The Los Angeles lad had been built of tougher stuff than the others. He had put up a fight, and

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Hook had had to kill him. You can measure the girl's skill in her end of the game by the fact that not one of the half dozen youths who had been trimmed had said the least thing to implicate her; and some of them had gone to great trouble to keep her out of it.

The house in Turk Street had been the mob's retreat, and, that it might be always a safe one, they had not worked their game in San Francisco. Hook and the girl were supposed by the neighbors to be the Quarres' son and daughter — and Tai was the Chinese cook. The Quarres' benign and respectable appearances had also come in handy when the mob had securities to be disposed of.

THE Chinese went to the gallows. We threw out the widest and finest-meshed of dragnets for the red-haired girl; and we turned up girls with bobbed red hair by the scores. But the girl Elvira was not among them.

I promised myself that some day. . . .

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Every once in a long while a story turns up that is so off the beaten track, so unclassifiable, so "different," that it can only be described as a "connoisseur's item." Such a story is William Lindsay Gresham's "The Crime Collector," and as such — a literary appetizer for the jaded palate of the true aficionado — we ask that you read this unusual short-short.

In all fairness your Editor must make certain confessions. First, we realize that "The Crime Collector" is not really a detective story, that strictly speaking it is not even a crime story; yet the evidence of criminality is clearly the strongest thread in the pattern and fabric of this unorthodox tale.

Second, we realize that many readers of EQMM may not like this story; but even if you don't, we feel it is worth a few minutes of your reading time to savor the rare flavor of "The Crime Collector."

Eustace Mayhew, you will discover, is a strange character, and his lifework — the collecting of fraud — is a strange avocation; but strangest of all is the consuming fear that has cost Eustace much of his sleep through the years. Consider deeply the colossal irony of that fear, and you will understand why we felt compelled to bring you this curious tale. . . .

THE CRIME COLLECTOR

by WILLIAM LINDSAY GRESHAM

EUSTACE MAYHEW, the collector, was a man I knew a long time ago. He was below medium height and may have resented it in his youth, but at the time I knew him he had put on weight, some two hundred pounds of it, and had grown a Vandyke beard — which is an intelligent fat man's best recourse.

How Eustace came to be rich I never learned. There was something about him that made you think it had come suddenly, an avalanche of good fortune — a twenty parlay, starting with a two dollar bet or something very like it. And within the boundaries of his own peculiar hobby he had kept his money and even multiplied it for all I know.

Eustace collected fraud. Or, more accurately, he collected fakes. His hobby began as a joke — friends sent him a meerschaum pipe in an elaborate leather case. They had read about the hoax perpetrated on Mark Twain; and Eustace, following in the great pilot's trusting footsteps, smoked the pipe night and day to "color" it. Naturally, when he took the chamois cover off, the imitation meerschaum had no soft golden shade but was as offensively white as the day it came.

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Eustace Mayhew knew he'd been taken in and realized, with even more chagrin, that he had read the Mark Twain incident and forgotten it. He kept the pipe under a little glass shade on his mantelpiece. A brass plate said: *Fake Meerschaum. This specimen actually fooled Eustace Mayhew.*

A short time afterward, Eustace was dining out when the host mentioned casually a batch of mining stock certificates which he was preparing to burn, having been taken in by an elaborately built-up confidence scheme. Eustace asked if he might buy the stock. He offered fifty cents a certificate and went home gleefully with the lot. "I wanted them because they had fooled a hard-headed businessman," he told me.

That was the real beginning of the Mayhew collection which eventually cost him nearly half a million. Eustace demanded fakes. But they had to be genuine frauds. How he hooted at an agent who tried to sell him the mummy of John Wilkes Booth! That veteran carnival attraction had never fooled anyone whom Eustace considered an expert. But I know that he spent several thousand, shortly after the "John" episode, on a mummy.

It was the mummy of a child which a young Egyptologist had discovered, wrapped, in a bale of miscellaneous junk that old Montrose, the antique dealer, had stored away in a warehouse.

The young scientist unwrapped it, with the help of two colleagues, preserving the amenities by photographing the procedure at every step, and finally got down to the mummy. By his decision he made that pathetic, withered form a candidate for the Mayhew collection.

"It is the body of a royal child," he said. He even translated the cartouche and told whose child it had been and within a century of when it had died. Controversy started and at the height of it an old woman shed reliable light on that little and obviously long-dead corpse. She was Montrose's former housekeeper; had, in her youth, given birth to a child out of wedlock, had concealed it as best she could. The child was defective in some way and died in its second year. The mother had wanted to bury it in the garden so she could be near it but sly old Montrose had a better idea. He gave it a royal funeral, slightly old-fashioned. The linen he baked in an oven until it was brown and fell in shreds, and then he trussed up the little body and gave it the name of a Pharoah's son. It was Montrose's only romantic action in a long life of bargain-driving and it was touching; but it rendered the mummy a fraud.

Eustace Mayhew stepped in. He offered to give the poor mite a decent burial; but the shriveled remains in the royal grave clothes never rested in the earth. They rested in Eustace's collection, which so few ever saw. And, at that, Eustace never showed everything.

Once McBain, an eccentric and shady dealer in autographs, came to

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Eustace with a treasure. It was a sheet of very soiled vellum, which he claimed was one of Thomas Chatterton's forgeries of ancient manuscript. Eustace, for all his flesh, had a great deal of strength. He threw MacBain through the door. For he already had word of the plot — the "Chatterton" was a double fraud. It was not a real Chatterton "forgery" — to possess a real Chatterton was Eustace's dearest wish and he grew purple at the thought of MacBain's sacrilegious attempt to bamboozle him.

At the time of his death, Eustace owned, among a host of other prizes, a genuine Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, a Thomas J. Wise "first edition," a unicorn's horn which had fooled the best minds of Nuremberg in its day, and a half-melted wax head of a Turk which had been purchased by Sir Archibald Whaley as the genuine head of Baron von Kempelen's chess-playing automaton, spirited away from the fire at Madame Tussaud's which destroyed that ingenious triumph. In this wax head Eustace had one of his crowning wreaths, figuratively speaking. For the original chess player had fooled Catherine the Great. And the wax imitation had fooled Archibald Whaley.

These rarities were among the scores which Eustace showed to me on the single visit I paid to his country house, forbidding grey stone and fireproofed, where he kept his treasures. From case to case, from cabinet to cabinet, Eustace led me on a rainy March afternoon. The hours flew by as he talked in his musical baritone:

". . . and here, a dainty piece. A Circassian dagger which once brought five hundred pounds at Christie's! Think of it! And made by an Armenian lad, a jeweler, in London's East End. Made it in a garret. He planted it among odds and ends in his shop and waited for an edged-weapons collector. Jasper Holingshead was the collector.

"When the lad saw Jasper's eye light on this dagger he knew his big fish was on the hook. He asked ten pounds for it. Note that figure. It infuriated Jasper. Either the ignorant lad should know its value and place the price higher, or he should have sold it for a song. Jasper left in a huff. He came back next week wearing a different style of hat, the idiot. The price was now twenty pounds. When it had doubled to eighty, Jasper bought. He sold it to Cunninghame for two hundred. When Cunninghame died it went under the hammer. I was there. I was there because I knew the Armenian lad — had even helped get him into a nursing home during his final bout with his chest. I heard that dagger go for five hundred pounds. And then I bought it back for fifty. The Armenian had placed a secret mark on the inside of the sheath. I told the owner the story afterwards. I would have paid the full price but he was an honorable old dotard. Wouldn't hear of it — didn't want to swindle me. He let me have it for fifty pounds, on condition that I never reveal his name. He was an expert,

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you see — the dagger had fooled him."

Eustace stopped, smiling, and his eyes vanished, little slits oozing good nature appearing in his face where his eyes had been. The Vandyke bobbed like the tail of a pullet.

"How I wish I could show you some of my best specimens," he said, chuckling and choking in merriment. "Honestly, my boy, I have some darbs. Some of the most luscious frauds that ever a long greybeard wagged over. What a pity I cannot show them. Why? My dear boy, you *are* naïve. How do you suppose I got them? You see, their intrinsic value is slight. It was the 'shame' attached to the deceit that made me have to . . . ah . . . acquire them. Or have them acquired for me. You understand now, I take it? Oh, I wouldn't think of revealing them, the darlings. They are my little secrets and I share them only with the great, with the experts, with the wise."

He lovingly drew a tray of counterfeit Roman coins from a rack and pointed to them with his tapering, white finger, creased delicately in rolls of fat and dimpled where it joined his hand. On it was a gold Viking ring. It was perfect. But the gold was too hard; only the scale of Moh could be invoked to prove it a replica.

My time had grown short. The afternoon had swept past as hours will in such a place and with such a man: a rogue and his gallery, a savant, a practical joker — but above all, a collector.

"My dear boy — is it tea time so soon? Life slips from us, like a golden fish from the hand, to steal a phrase. Anyhow, you must come again. Promise you will. I might relent and show you one or two of my real treasures. You have the understanding eye, full of chicanery, my boy — full of chicanery yourself, I'll be bound. Devil and all! I'll show you one before you go. This way. She has a room to herself."

It was up a flight of narrow stairs. He found the key on his elaborate bunch and threw open the door, snapping a light switch. The room was empty of furniture, its walls a neutral shade. There were no windows. Across the room a single painting hung beneath a shaded light. A small, lonely rectangle. For a moment I wondered what was so fantastically rare about it. Then with a shock I realized what I was seeing.

It was the Mona Lisa.

Eustace was watching my face. His eyes disappeared again and this time his tiny pink tongue moistened his lips and he spoke with his voice lowered in reverence. "There she stands, my boy. A genuine Balsamo. You know of him, of course — the mad copyist. Mad as a March hare, not the slightest doubt of it, but what a genius! He worked away in an attic in Genoa after the Gioconda had been stolen from the Louvre. He made six of them, each to be sold to a collector as the original. But when the Surêté found him he had seven Mona Lisas and there was the devil's

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own squabble before they selected one to hang in that old rabbit warren of galleries called the Louvre. I wouldn't take — for this gorgeous, this inspired, this divine deception — all the daubs and lumps of granite in the whole Louvre. . . ."

He laid his hand on my arm. "You understand — if it became known that now the missing copy is here. . . ." He opened one eye and from it shot me a single, baleful glance of warning. The next instant good humor had rolled back over his face.

Eustace approached and lovingly ran his finger behind the frame. "The steel braces, added in recent times to support the wooden panel on which Leonardo painted — all perfect, all identical with the original. You see, there is no difference at all. The experts still rage in secret. Some have defied the officials to put the acknowledged painting under X-rays. And that is my sorrow. If only they could make a real decision." He closed his eyes and shook his head, letting out a sharp sigh.

"I get up in the middle of the night and come in here in my slippers, just to touch her. How beautifully she smirks, the deceiving wench! Ah well, this is my only cross and it's bearable, most of the time. My only fear. You see, my boy, it has cost me some sleep down through the years. What if she proved, in the end, to be the *genuine* Mona Lisa?"

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A surprisingly large percentage of famous literary figures have tried their hand at writing the detective short story. Some have merely "stooped to conquer." In these instances the results invariably bear the mark of the greatest of literary sins — insincerity. Others, however, have attempted in all good faith to conquer the technical difficulties of the form. In these instances the results are seldom so-so: great writers usually produce either solid successes or hollow failures.

Many of the successes — superior detective stories written by authors who have distinguished themselves in the more "serious" fields of writing — have already appeared in "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine." For examples: Arnold Bennett's unorthodox "Murder!"; Irvin S. Cobb's decidedly unhumorous "Cabbages and Kings"; Ben Hecht's brilliant "Crime Without Passion"; Wilbur Daniel Steele's unforgettable "Blue Murder"; C. S. Forester's ironic "The Turn of the Tide"; Ellen Glasgow's provocative "A Point in Morals"; Frank Swinnerton's surprising "The Verdict"; Mark Twain's hilarious "The Stolen White Elephant"; H. G. Wells's realistic "The Hammerpond Park Burglary"; James M. Cain's tough and terrifying "The Baby in the Icebox"; Marc Connelly's strangely physiological and psychological "Coroner's Inquest"; William Faulkner's dark-of-the-moon "The Hound"; W. Somerset Maugham's fascinating "Footprints in the Jungle"; Christopher Morley's literary "The Curious Case of Kenelm Digby." Remember these truly fine tales of murder, theft, and passion? They were homicidal high-spots, sandwiched in between the best stories of John Dickson Carr, Dashiell Hammett, Agatha Christie, Georges Simenon, Cornell Woolrich, Margery Allingham, Dorothy L. Sayers, Craig Rice, and other acknowledged masters, and all brought to you during the first three years of "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine's" existence. More recently, EQMM offered you Theodore Dreiser's oriental "The Prince Who Was A Thief"; Phyllis Bottome's immoral "The Liqueur Glass," and Susan Glaspell's New-England-Gothic "A Jury of Her Peers." And for issues to come we have scheduled detective-crime stories by Louis Bromfield, Elmer Rice, Katherine Brush, Walter Duranty, John van Druten, Jeffery Farnol, John Steinbeck, and others.

You will note that one famous literary name in the galaxy of EQMM contributors is absent — James Hilton, author of LOST HORIZON *and* GOODBYE, MR. CHIPS, *and one of the best-loved of contemporary writers. Mr. Hilton's efforts in the detective genre are virtually unsuspected. How many of you know that he wrote an excellent detective novel called* MURDER

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AT SCHOOL (in the United States it was titled WAS IT MURDER?*), first published in 1931 under the pen-name of Glen Trevor?*

Mr. Hilton's detective short stories are even more unknown. We brought you "The Mallet" in our September 1942 issue and now, three and a half years later, we bring you "The Perfect Plan," a story never before published in America.

James Hilton's approach to the detective-crime short story is simply this: to do the unusual. He writes with such ease and grace, with such effortless simplicity, that the unusualness of his basic theme is deceptively hidden. This was especially true in "The Mallet." The conventional detective story aims at two complementary effects: emphasis on the character of the detective and concealment of the identity of the criminal. In "The Mallet" Hilton applied reverse-English: he emphasized the character of the criminal and concealed the identity of the detective. In "The Perfect Plan" Mr. Hilton again achieves the unusual. Basing his story on the familiar (and overworked) theme of the unbreakable alibi, Mr. Hilton is not content to give his criminal the supporting evidence of one or two persons; in "The Perfect Plan" the murderer fabricates an alibi that can be vouched for by literally hundreds of thousands of people! Indeed, everything in "The Perfect Plan" was perfect except one wholly unpredictable detail — that unreckonable and ungovernable factor, the murderer's mind. . . .

THE PERFECT PLAN

by JAMES HILTON

EVERY public man has his enemies, but few of these enemies would wish to murder him, or are in a position to do so in any case. Sir George Winthrop-Dunster, however, was unfortunate in these respects. He had his enemies, and one of them, his secretary, both wished to murder him, and did so.

Sir George, as chairman of the Anglo-Oceanic group of companies, was what is called "a well-known figure in the City." He belonged to the modern school of financiers who instead of being fat, heavy-jowled, gold-ringed, and white-spatted, look more like overgrown public-school prefects. He was fifty-five, played energetic squash-rackets, wore neat lounge suits, and as often as not lunched in a pub off a glass of sherry and a ham sandwich.

Scarsdale, his private secretary, was not unlike him in physique, but nearly a quarter of a century younger. With a First in Greats at Oxford and a B. Sc. Econ. of London, he was well equipped to deal with the numerous

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complications of Sir George's affairs, and for five years he had given every satisfaction. Well, almost. Just one little rift had once appeared — in 1928, when Scarsdale had rashly bought Amal. Zincs in greater quantities than he had cash to pay for. He had not exactly pledged Sir George's credit in the transaction, but he had made use of Sir George's stockbroker, and when the account finished with Amal. Zincs well down, it was to Sir George that he had perforce to confess the little mishap. A hundred pounds more than covered everything, and Sir George wrote a check instantly. He did not lecture, or even rebuke; he merely specified arrangements by which the sum could be repaid out of Scarsdale's monthly salary.

This amounted to three hundred a year, and within two years the debt had been fully repaid, plus interest at 5 per cent. No other unfortunate incident had occurred, and the relations between the two men seemed as good as ever. Then, in 1930, Scarsdale received a tentative offer of a better post. It was an important one, and his prospective employer, purely as a matter of routine, wished to effect a fidelity insurance for which a testimonial from Sir George would be necessary.

When Scarsdale approached Sir George about this, the financier talked to him with all the suavity he usually reserved for shareholders' meetings. "My dear Scarsdale," he replied, in his curiously high-pitched voice, "I have no objection whatever to your leaving me, but I have, I admit, a certain reluctance to putting my name to any statement that is not absolutely correct. Take this question, for instance: 'Have you always found him to be strictly honest and reliable while in your service?' Now, my truthful reply to that would be: 'With one exception, yes.' Do you think that would help you?"

Obviously it would have been worse than no reply at all, and in default of the required testimonial the offer of the job fell through, and Scarsdale remained Sir George's secretary. Sir George, no doubt, congratulated himself on having secured a permanently good bargain. He was that kind of a man.

But had he known it, he was really much less to be congratulated. For just as Sir George was *that* kind of a man, so Scarsdale was another kind, equally rare perhaps.

It was not until a year had passed that Scarsdale decided that the time had come to murder Sir George. During the interval he had come to regard the matter with something of the detachment of the chess player; indeed, the problem had rather comforted than worried him amid the botherations of a secretary's life. He had always, since his school days, been interested in the science of crime, and never for a moment did he doubt his own capacity to do the job; it was merely a question of waiting until the perfect moment offered itself. That moment seemed to him to be arriving in February 1931 — his choice being

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determined by two fortuitous circumstances — (1) that at 8 P.M. on Saturday the 22nd, Sir George was to deliver a broadcast talk on "Post-War Monetary Policy," and (2) that immediately after the talk, which was to be given from the London studio, he intended to travel to Banbury to spend the weekend with his brother Richard.

On the morning of the 22nd Scarsdale awoke at his usual time at Bramstock Towers, Berkshire. It was a pleasant establishment, surrounded by a large and well-wooded estate, and Scarsdale, glancing through the window as he dressed, was glad to see that there had been no rain during the night and that the weather was fine and cold.

Sir George always breakfasted in his bedroom, and did not meet his secretary until ten o'clock, in the library. By this time Scarsdale had, as usual, been at work for an hour or so opening letters and typing replies for Sir George's signature. After an exchange of good mornings, Sir George made a very customary announcement. "I'll just look through these letters, Scarsdale; then we'll take a turn round the garden while I tell you about my wireless talk tonight. I want you to prepare a few notes for me. . . ."

"Certainly, Sir George," replied Scarsdale. A great piece of luck, for the after-breakfast tour of the estate, though almost an institution in fine weather, might just, for one reason or another, have been foregone.

The men were soon dressed for outdoors and strolling briskly across the terrace towards the woods — the usual gambit, Scarsdale observed, with continuing satisfaction. Sir George meanwhile divided his attention between the garden and his impending radio talk. "You see, Scarsdale, I want those figures about the American Federal Reserve note issue. . . . Ah, that *cupressus macrocarpa* seems to be doing nicely. . . . And a month-to-month table of Wall Street brokers' loans. . . ." And so on, till they were deep in the woods, over half a mile from the house. The thickets, even in mid-winter, were very dark. "I want your notes by three at the latest, so that I can catch the 3:50 from Lincott and work up my talk in the train. . . . Ah, just look at that — Fanning really ought to notice these things. Confound the fellow!"

Fanning was the head gardener, and "that" was nothing more dreadful than an old kettle under a bush. But to Sir George it was serious enough, for if there were one thing that annoyed him more than another it was the suggestion of trespassers on his land. "Why the devil don't Fanning and his men keep their eyes open?" he exclaimed crossly; but in that he did Fanning an injustice, since the kettle had not been there more than a few hours; Scarsdale, in fact, had placed it there himself the evening before.

Suddenly Scarsdale cried: "Why, look there, sir — the door of the hut's open! A tramp, I suppose. Wonder if he's still inside, by any chance."

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At this point Sir George began to behave precisely as Scarsdale had guessed and hoped he would. He left the path and strode vehemently amid the trees and undergrowth towards the small square erection just visible in the near distance. "By Jove, Scarsdale," he shouted, "if I do catch the fellow, I'll teach him a lesson."

"Yes, rather," agreed Scarsdale.

Striding together through the less and less penetrable thickets, they reached the hut at last. It was built of grey stone, with a stout wooden door — the whole edifice intended originally as a sort of summerhouse, but long disused. For years it had functioned at rare intervals as a store place for sawn-up logs; but now, as Scarsdale entered it, it proved empty even of them. Nor was there a tramp in it, either. "He must have gone, sir," said Scarsdale, pulling wide open the half-gaping door. "Though it does look as if he's left a few relics. . . . I say, sir, what do you make of this?" He waited for Sir George to enter. "Damnation, that's my last match gone! Have you a match, Sir George?"

As Sir George began to fumble in his pocket in the almost complete darkness Scarsdale added: "I say, sir, you've dropped something — your handkerchief, I think."

Sir George stooped, and at the same instant Scarsdale shot him neatly through the head with a small automatic pistol which he had that very morning abstracted from the drawer of the Boule cabinet in Sir George's private study.

Afterwards, still wearing gloves, of course, he placed the weapon by the side of the dead man, closed the door carefully from the outside, and walked away.

All murders — all enterprises of any kind, in fact — carry with their accomplishment a certain minimum of risk; and at this point, as Scarsdale had all along recognized, the risks began. Fortunately, they were very small ones. The hut was isolated and only rarely visited; Fanning and his men were not interested in it at all, and the whole incident of the visiting tramp had been a mere invention to lure Sir George to the spot. Scarsdale felt reasonably sure that the body would remain undiscovered until a deliberate search were made.

Leaving the woods, he returned to the house by way of the garages. There he took out his two-seater car, drove it round to the front of the house, and had a friendly chat with Wilkes, the butler. "Oh, Wilkes, would you mind bringing down Sir George's suitcase? He's decided to go right on to town immediately, so he won't be in to lunch. He's walking over to Lincott through the fields. . . . Oh, and you might label the bag for Banbury — I've got to get it sent off at the station."

"Will you be returning to lunch yourself, sir?"

"Oh, yes."

"Very good, sir."

Lincott, which Scarsdale reached through winding lanes within a quarter of an hour, was a middle-sized

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village with a large and important railway junction. There were three facts about Lincott that were, from Scarsdale's point of view, fortunate — (1) its railway station was large, frequented, and badly lit; (2) there were convenient expresses to London, as well as a late "down" train at night; and (3) Sir George's estate offered a pleasant short cut to the village, a short cut which Sir George was fond of traversing on foot and alone, even after dark.

Scarsdale drove direct to the junction and left the suitcase for despatch to Banbury, whence it would be forwarded immediately to the house of Sir George's brother. Then he proceeded to a neighboring garage, arranged to leave his car until called for, and asked to use the telephone. Ringing up the Towers, he had a second amiable talk with Wilkes. "Oh, hullo, Wilkes — this is Scarsdale speaking — from Lincott. Sir George has slightly changed his plans again — or rather my plans. He wants me to go along to town with him right away. Yes. . . . Yes. . . . I'm leaving my car here. . . . Yes, that's what I want to tell you — I've decided that as I'm going to town I may as well spend the week-end there at my club. . . . I'll be back on Tuesday, you know. . . . Yes. . . . Good-bye. . . ."

Scarsdale then walked to the junction, booked a third-class single ticket to Paddington, and caught the 1 P.M. train. At Paddington he did several things. First he went to the local booking-office and purchased a third-class single ticket to Ealing. Then he took a snack at a nearby A.B.C. shop, and about 3 P.M. travelled by omnibus to the bank, whence he walked to the Anglo-Oceanic offices in Bishopsgate. There he met several people whom he knew very well, chatted with them affably, and busied himself for some time in Sir George's private office. "Yes, Sir George is in town, but he's very busy — I don't suppose you'll see him here today." Williamson, one of the head-office people, grinned. "Yes, he's busy," Scarsdale repeated, faintly returning the grin. They both knew that there were aspects of Sir George's life that had nothing to do with the Anglo-Oceanic companies. "Taking her to the theatre, eh?" queried Williamson.

"More likely to the cinema," returned Scarsdale. "He's not free tonight, anyhow — he's got a date at the B.B.C. — and left me the devil's own pile of work to finish, too."

It was quite natural, therefore, that Scarsdale should still be at work in Sir George's private office when Williamson and the rest of the staff left. At 6 P.M., by which time the huge office building was tenantless, Scarsdale, having previously made fast the door on the inside, turned to a little job that he had not cared to tackle before. Opening the safe by means of the combination, he carefully abstracted certain documents — to be precise, South American bearer bonds to the value of between thirty and forty thousand pounds. How odd, he reflected, that Sir George, who would

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not give him a simple testimonial of honesty, had never scrupled to leave the keys and combination of his private safe in an unlocked bureau drawer at the Towers!

Leaving the Anglo-Oceanic offices about 6:30 P.M., Scarsdale took an omnibus to Piccadilly Circus and entered a cinema that was showing a film so remarkably bad that in the five-and-ninepenny seats he had almost an entire row to himself at that early hour of the evening. There and then, in the surrounding gloom, he managed to transform himself into a fairly credible impersonation of Sir George Winthrop-Dunster. In build and dress they were rather similar: nothing else was required but a few touches of grease-paint, a false moustache, and the adjustment of Sir George's characteristic type of horn-rimmed spectacles. The disguise would have deceived anyone who did not know Sir George intimately.

Scarsdale left the cinema about 7:30, choosing the middle of a film. A few moments in a telephone booth enabled him, with the help of a pocket-mirror, to make good any small deficiencies in his quick change. It had all, so far, been delightfully easy. At 7:55 he took a taxi to the old B.B.C. headquarters in Savoy Hill.

Neither he nor Sir George had ever broadcast before, and Scarsdale was quite genuinely interested in the experience. In the reception room he had an amiable chat with one of the studio officials, and found no difficulty at all in keeping up the character and impersonation of Sir George. Indeed, he not only talked and behaved like Sir George, but he found himself even thinking as Sir George would have thought — which was rather horrible.

At eight o'clock he took his place in the thick-carpeted studio and began to read from his typed manuscript. It was a cosy and completely restful business. With the little green-shaded lamp illuminating the script and the perfectly silent surroundings, it was a comfort to realize that, by such simple means, he was fabricating an alibi that could be vouched for afterwards by hundreds of thousands of worthy folk all over the country. He read Sir George's views on monetary policy with a perfection of utterance that surprised even himself, especially the way he had got the high-pitched voice.

Leaving the studios half an hour later he asked the commissionaire in the hall to get him a taxi, and in the man's hearing told the driver "Paddington." There he commenced another series of operations. First he put through a long distance call to Richard Winthrop-Dunster, of Banbury. "That you, Richard?" sang out the high-pitched voice, still functioning. "I'm extremely sorry, but I'm afraid I won't be able to spend the weekend at your place after all. Fact is, I've got a rather worrying piece of business on hand at the moment, and I can't spare the time. . . . Yes, things *are* infernally worrying just now. . . . Next week I might come — I'll try to, anyhow, so you might keep my bag, if it's arrived — oh, it *has*, has it? Yes, I told

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young Scarsdale to send it. . . . Yes, that's right — keep it till next week. . . . I'm at Paddington, just about to catch the 9:15 home — yes, I've just come from the studio — were you listening? . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Goodbye, then — next week, I hope. . . ."

Then Scarsdale went to the booking office and purchased a first-class single ticket to Lincott. Passing the barrier, he even risked a word or two with the man who snipped his ticket, and who knew Sir George very slightly. "Cold evening, Sir George," the man said.

Scarsdale found an empty first-class compartment and as soon as the train moved out from the platform, opened the small nondescript attaché-case which he had carried with him all day. With the help of its contents, he began to make sundry changes in his personal appearance; then taking from his pocket the single ticket to Ealing purchased earlier in the day, he cut out of it a triangular section similar to that snipped from his Lincott ticket. Finally, at Ealing, a slim, clean-shaven fellow in a cloth cap might have been seen to leave the train and climb the steps to the street. He carried a brown-paper parcel which, if examined, would have been found to contain (rather oddly) an attaché-case.

Scarsdale boarded a bus going east, and at Ealing Common changed to an Underground train. At 10 P.M. — long before the train from Paddington would have reached Lincott — Scarsdale, himself again, was entering a West End restaurant and exchanging a cordial good evening with a head waiter who knew him well by sight.

Throughout the weekend Scarsdale stayed in London, visiting numerous friends — indeed, there was scarcely an hour from morning to midnight which he did not spend in company. His nights at the club were conveniently preluded by friendly chats with the hall porter, and in the mornings, at breakfast, he was equally affable to the waiter.

On Tuesday afternoon he returned to the Towers, collecting his car at Lincott on the way, and got to work immediately on Sir George's accumulated correspondence. "I know Sir George will expect to find everything finished," he explained to Wilkes.

But dinner time came and Sir George did not arrive. It was peculiar, because he was usually back by the six o'clock train when he visited his brother.

At nine Scarsdale decided to have dinner without further waiting; but when ten o'clock came and it was clear that Sir George had not caught the last train from Banbury, Scarsdale agreed with Wilkes that Richard Winthrop-Dunster had better be informed of the situation. "Maybe Sir George is staying there an extra night," said Scarsdale, as the butler hurried to the telephone.

Five minutes later Wilkes returned with a pale and troubled face. "Mr. Richard says that Sir George never visited him at all, sir," he began falteringly. "He says Sir George rang him up late on Saturday night from Pad-

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dington cancelling the visit and saying he was on his way back here."

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Scarsdale. "Why isn't he here then? Where the devil can he be?"

They discussed the problem with an increasing degree of consternation until midnight, and went to bed with mutually expressed hopes that some message might arrive by the morning's post. But none came. At noon, after consultation with Scarsdale and further telephoning to Banbury, Wilkes notified the police. Inspector Deane, of the local force, arrived during the afternoon, and after acquainting himself with the known details of the situation, motored over to Banbury to see Mr. Richard Winthrop-Dunster. All that was on Wednesday.

On Thursday morning enquiries began at Paddington station, with immediate and gratifying result. As Inspector Deane put it: "Well, Mr. Scarsdale, we've traced Sir George as far as the Lincott train on Saturday night — there's a ticket inspector at Paddington who remembers him. We're not quite sure of him at Lincott, but no doubt he must have been seen there too."

Everything, Scarsdale was glad to perceive, was still working out perfectly according to plan. From Paddington the trail had already led to Lincott; soon it would lead from Lincott to the Towers — and on the way, to be discovered inevitably when the constabulary intelligence had progressed so far, was that little hut in the woods. But it was not part of Scarsdale's plan to anticipate this inevitability by any hint or suggestion. He merely said: "Perhaps you could advertise for information. The taximen in the station yard may have noticed him, or one of them may have driven him somewhere. Of course, if it was a fine night he may have walked. He often walks. It was a fine night in London, I remember."

"Quite so, sir," agreed Inspector Deane. "I'm sure I'm greatly obliged to you for the idea."

It was queer how the two men "took to" each other; Scarsdale had a delightful knack of putting people at their ease. But for the mischance of working for Sir George, he would probably never have murdered anybody.

The plan remained perfect — indeed, he thought, as he settled for sleep that night, he could afford almost to be indifferent now; the dangerous interval was past, and it no longer greatly mattered when or how the body was discovered. Perhaps it would be tomorrow, or the next day, or the next week even, if the police were exceptionally stupid. He had in mind exactly what would happen subsequently. The medical evidence would, of course, be vague after such a lapse of time, but fully consistent with Sir George's death having taken place late on Saturday night, at an hour (if the matter were ever called into question) when he, Scarsdale, had several complete alibis sixty miles away. Then would come the question: How had it happened? At such a junc-

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ture the dead man's brother would probably recall that Sir George had stated over the telephone on the fatal night, that he was "worried" about some business affair. Scarsdale would then, with a little reluctance to discuss the private affairs of his late employer, admit that Sir George had had certain financial troubles of late. The next stage of revelation would doubtless be enacted at the Anglo-Oceanic office, when and where the disappearance of the bonds would be discovered. That would certainly cause a sensation, both in the City and beyond. Clearly it would suggest that Sir George, having monkeyed with the assets of his companies, had taken his life rather than face the music.

All this, of course, was according to Scarsdale's plan, and when, on Thursday morning, the police found the body of Sir George in the little hut in the woods, Scarsdale might have been excused for reckoning his plan ninety-nine per cent infallible. Unfortunately for him, the remaining one per cent took a hand, with the rather odd result that a man named Hansell was arrested a few hours later and charged with the murder of Sir George.

Hansell was an unemployed workman turned tramp, and had been arrested in a Lincott public-house after trying to pawn a watch which an alert shopman recognized as Sir George's. At first Hansell gave the usual yarn about having found the watch, but after a severe questioning at the police station he told a much more extraordinary story. On the previous Saturday, he said, about a quarter past eight in the evening, he had been trespassing in the woods belonging to the Towers estate. Finding the little hut he had pushed open the door and had there, to his great alarm and astonishment, come across the dead body of a man. At first he thought of going for help immediately, but as he felt that his own position might be thought rather questionable, he had contented himself in the end with rifling the pockets and decamping. He admitted having taken some papers and a wallet, which he had since destroyed, except for a few treasury notes it had contained. He had also taken the watch.

But at 8:15 P.M., as the police detectives did not fail to point out, Sir George had been broadcasting a talk from the B.B.C. studio in London. How, then, could he have been found sixty miles away, dead, at the same hour? Obviously Hansell must be a great liar.

He was brought before the local magistrates and speedily committed for trial at the assizes. Meanwhile Scarsdale, in the midst of well-simulated grief at the loss of a respected employer, was thinking hard. The arrest of Hansell had given him a shock at first, but he was not long in finding a way of fitting it into his plan. Indeed, now that the suicide theory was all out of focus, Scarsdale himself thought fit to make the discovery about the missing bonds, and was inclined to agree with the police

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when they suggested that the bonds might have been among the papers that Hansell had stolen from Sir George's pockets and afterwards destroyed.

The trial of Hansell came on in due course. He pleaded "Not Guilty," but his story sounded pretty thin, and was not improved by the fact that he still insisted that he had found the body at 8:15 P.M. He had heard the Lincott church clock chime the quarter, he said, and no amount of cross-examination could shake him. Moreover, the prosecution were able to prove that his fingerprints were on the automatic pistol. Hansell explained this by saying that he had found the weapon lying beside the body and had picked it up; but the story was unconvincing. Was it not more likely that Sir George had been taking the short cut home from Lincott station (as he often did), that he had been attacked by Hansell and had drawn his automatic (which he often carried) to defend himself, that Hansell had wrested it from him, and had shot him with it, and had afterwards dragged the body into the shed and, in sheer panic, left the telltale weapon behind?

Defending counsel could only offer the alternative theory of suicide, which, in the case of so well-respected a personage as Sir George, seemed a breach of taste as well as a straining of probability. As for Hansell, he must, whatever he said, have mistaken the time of his visit to the hut. Neither of these suggestions appealed to judge and jury, and it was not surprising that Hansell was found guilty and sentenced to death. This was afterwards commuted to penal servitude for life.

Scarsdale, with the trial over and everything settling down, had now only the tail end of his plan to put into cautious execution. He would wait, he had decided, for twelve months (to avoid any semblance of flight), and then go abroad, probably to the Argentine, taking with him the bonds. After a year or two in Buenos Aires he would doubtless have formed a sufficiently intimate connection with some banker or stockbroker to enable him to begin disposing of the booty.

It has already been noted that the verdict of "murder" instead of "suicide" did not at first disturb the vast and almost terrifying equanimity of Scarsdale. What did trouble him, however, as time passed and the death of Sir George became history, was the gradually invading consciousness that the only thing that had saved him from the dock, and possibly from the gallows, was not his precious plan at all, but sheer luck! For if Hansell had reported the finding of the body without delay, the faked alibi of the broadcast would have been discovered. Scarsdale had been saved, then, not by the flawlessness of his own brainwork but by a casual circumstance entirely outside of his control!

It was an unwelcome conclusion to reach, partly because it robbed him of pride in achievement, but chiefly because it laid him open to disquieting thoughts of the future.

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During the year of waiting in England he lived at Kew, renting a house near the river and living on his savings while he devoted himself to writing a book on his favorite subject — criminology. It passed the time; besides which, he had hopes that it would eventually establish his reputation.

He received several minor shocks during this period. One happened when an acquaintance named Lindsey accosted him suddenly at his club (and apropos of nothing at all): "You know, Scarsdale, you're awfully like old Dunster in appearance. Did you ever realize that? I'm sure you could easily have passed for him during his lifetime with the help of a false moustache and those goggles of his! Especially, too, if you could have managed that rather shrill way of talking he had. And you *are* a bit of an actor-chap, aren't you? Didn't you once play in something at Oxford?"

Scarsdale wondered whether his face were turning fiery red or ashen pale. He managed to laugh, and an hour or so later reached the satisfying conclusion that it had all been pure chance — nothing but that. But it was upsetting, all the same, and it was about this time that he began the habit of carrying a small automatic pistol about with him wherever he went. He would not be taken alive.

Just about a month before the year was up, Lindsey telephoned him with immense cheerfulness one morning. "Oh, hullo, Scarsdale. I'm in a job now, and you'll never guess where. It's in the B.B.C. . . ." Several minutes of excited chatter, and then: "By the way, how would you like to do a short talk on Crimes and Criminals, or something of the sort? We're getting up a series here and your name occurred to me — you've always been keen on the subject, haven't you? What about June 11th, say?"

Scarsdale had hoped to be in Buenos Aires by that date, but he could not very well say so, and some kind of caution urged him not to make excuses. Besides, he could not help being slightly thrilled at the prospect of making a whole country listen to his views on crime and criminals. He told Lindsey that the date would suit him quite well.

During the eight weeks' interval, however, there came to him once or twice the faintest possible misgiving — soon banished, but leaving nevertheless a flavor of anxiety behind.

On the evening of June 11th he did not feel at his best as he set out for Savoy Hill. He was due to speak from 8 P.M. until 8:20, and he could not escape the recollection of the last time he had entered the building. It was odd, perhaps, that the very same announcer should be welcoming him again now, though it was quite natural, no doubt, that the announcer, knowing that Scarsdale had been Sir George's secretary should begin to chat about the deceased gentleman. "Awfully sad business that was," commented the familiar dulcet tones. "I talked to him that very evening just as I'm talking to you now. Amazing that he should have been so near his

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tragic end — indeed, I often wonder if he had any premonition of it himself, because he seemed just slightly uneasy in manner."

"Did he?" said Scarsdale.

"Of course it may have been my imagination. I was only comparing him with other times I'd heard him speak — at company meetings. Fortunately, I'd already sold all my Anglo-Oceanics. Queer he should have been carrying all those bonds about with him — forty thousand pounds' worth of them, wasn't it?"

"It was never absolutely proved."

"But bearer bonds, weren't they? Doesn't that mean that anybody who got hold of them could raise money on them?"

"More or less," answered Scarsdale absently. He had suddenly begun to feel troubled. He wished he had not arrived early enough for this chat.

By 7:55 the announcer had reached the stage of offering a few general tips about broadcasting. "This is your first experience of the microphone, I understand, Mr. Scarsdale?"

Scarsdale nodded.

"Curious — I thought I recognized your face. Or perhaps you're very like someone else. . . . However, you'll soon get over mike-fright, even if you do have a touch of it at first. The chief point to remember is, never to speak too fast or in a very high-pitched voice. But then, you don't, as a matter of fact, do you?"

Scarsdale was a trifle pale. "I don't think so," he murmured.

Five minutes later he sat at the little desk before the microphone, with the green-shaded lamp before him. He was certainly nervous, and beyond his nervousness, strangely uneasy in a deeper sense. It was peculiar; he hadn't been like it before. As he sat down, his foot caught in the flex that connected the lamp with the wall-plug; the lamp went out, but it did not matter; the globes overhead were sufficient to see by. He waited for the red light to deliver its signal, indicating that he had been properly introduced to his unseen audience; then he began to read his manuscript.

But all the time he was reading, he was thinking and pondering subconsciously . . . he had been there before . . . the announcer had thought so, too . . . the announcer had seen and heard Sir George in the flesh at company meetings . . . . the announcer had told him he must avoid a high-pitched voice . . . bearer bonds . . . this was the very same studio — and the same time also — eight o'clock . . . and it was Lindsey who had fixed up his talk, and Lindsey who had once commented on his likeness to Sir George. . . .

Suddenly the idea burst over him in full force, monstrous, all-conquering: this was all a plant — engineered jointly by Lindsey and the B.B.C. — with perhaps Scotland Yard in the discreet background — they were testing him, and by the very latest psychological methods, as expounded by the great French criminologists. . . . They guessed the truth and were probing subtly — it was *their* perfect plan

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seeking to undermine *his* . . .

At that moment, while Scarsdale's eyes and voice were reading automatically, the announcer stole into the room and silently replaced the lamp-plug in the wall-socket. The green light blazed suddenly into Scarsdale's face as the intruder, in a whisper too soft to be audible to the microphone, murmured: "Pulled it off, didn't you? I thought that's what must have happened. . . ."

Scarsdale's broadcast talk on Crimes and Criminals will never, it is safe to say, be forgotten in the history of the radio. Most listeners, as the talk progressed, must have been aware of a growing tension in the speaker's delivery — a tension ill-suited both to matter and theme. But it is certain that no listener remained unthrilled when, about sixteen minutes past eight, Scarsdale exclaimed, in a voice vibrating with excitement: "And here, if I may be permitted, I will interpose an example of what I consider to be the really perfect, undetectable crime . . . . *I myself murdered Sir George Winthrop-Dunster.* . . ."

At this point the loud-speakers in some hundreds of thousands of homes delivered themselves of a mysterious crashing sound, followed by a long silence until 8:35, when a familiar Oxford accent expressed regret for the delay and gave out, without further comment, the continuation of the evening's program.

In the morning, however, the newspapers were less reticent. Scarsdale, it appeared, had made history by being the first person actually to commit suicide before the microphone. He had shot himself.

The inquest was held the following day and attracted great attention. The announcer was very gentle and soothing in giving evidence — almost as if he were reading an S.O.S. "It seemed to me," he said, "that Mr. Scarsdale was rather upset about something when he arrived at the studio. He was a few minutes early and we chatted together. We talked a little about Sir George Winthrop-Dunster. I concluded that Mr. Scarsdale was probably nervous, as it was his first broadcast. About halfway through the talk I noticed that the lamp over his desk had gone out — he must have caught his foot in the flex and pulled the plug away. I went in to put it right for him and noticed then that he wasn't looking at all well. He was very pale, and he stared at me in a rather queer way when I mentioned something about the light. A few minutes later I had to put up the signal warning him not to talk in such a high-pitched voice because the sound wasn't coming through properly. The next I heard was his extraordinary statement about — er — Sir George Winthrop-Dunster. Of course I rushed to cut off the microphone immediately, but before I could do so I heard the shot. . . ."

The verdict was naturally one of "Suicide during temporary insanity."

Even the last of Scarsdale's plans went astray. Instead of being fearfully acknowledged as the perpetrator of

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the world's perfect murder, he was dismissed as that familiar and rather troublesome type — the neurotic person who confesses to a crime of which he is quite obviously innocent. "Poor Scarsdale," said Inspector Deane, in a special interview for one of the Sunday papers, "had been deeply distressed by the tragic death of his employer, and that, coupled with his interest in criminology (I understand he was writing a book on the subject), had combined to unhinge his mind. . . . We often get similar confessions during well-known murder trials, and as a rule, as on this occasion, we can spot them at a glance." Answering a further question, Inspector Deane remarked: "As a matter of fact, Scarsdale wasn't within fifty miles of Lincott during the whole of the time that the crime could possibly have been committed. We know that, because in the ordinary course of police routine we had to check up his movements. . . . Poor fellow, we all liked him. He helped us a good deal in our work, though it was clear all the time that he was feeling things badly."

Just one point remains — about those bonds. If ever it should be discovered that Scarsdale had had in his possession a small fortune in South American bearer certificates, a certain measure of suspicion would inevitably be cast upon him — albeit posthumously. But will such a discovery be made? Scarsdale had put them in a tin box and had buried the box three feet deep in the back garden of the house he rented at Kew; and who, pray, is ever likely to dig them up?

"Q"

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This may be the last P. Moran story to appear in EQMM. We sincerely hope not, but as the incomparable Jimmy Durante says, "Those are the conditions that prevail." Of all the comic criminologists ever conceived we are most partial to Mr. Wilde's Connecticut Yankee; that is why, at one time or another, we have dubbed him the Correspondence-School Sleuth Supreme and the Defective Detective De Luxe. But now it seems that Mr. Wilde has other, and more important, fish to fry, and will probably not find time to continue the misadventures of "gorjus" Pete.

There is one glimmer of hope. We have been told on exceedingly reliable authority that Mr. Wilde's publisher, Random House, looks kindly on the idea of putting Pete between covers. At the time of this writing, however, there are insufficient P. Moran short stories to make up a full-size book of shorts. So it is still possible perhaps to persuade Percival to perpetuate Pete in print; and if further exploits emanate from Mr. Wilde's now-unwilling pen, we shall do our editorial best to keep P. Moran, Mail Order Master Manhunter, an EQMM "exclusive."

P. MORAN AND THE POISON PEN

by PERCIVAL WILDE

From: Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, N. Y.,
To: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.

. . . It is difficult or impossible to disguise handwriting, for handwriting is formed in the brain, not in the hand. You may write with a pen, a pencil, or a paintbrush, you may use ink, lead, or even blood, but the directing force is always the same, and it is the mind that cannot get rid of the individual traits that make it different from all other minds. The anonymous letter-writer, the blackmailer, the "poison-pen" lunatic, may reverse the ordinary slope of his letters; he may make his writing large (because it is usually small) or small (because it is usually large); he may even print, trying to lose the peculiarities which identify his normal hand, but through it all the characteristics of the real man will persist, and the writing will be identifiable as his and that of no other man in the world.

You may be sure of one thing: the writer will pretend to be of an intellectual stature other than his own. If he is well educated he will resort to misspellings and bad English; if his schooling stopped with the elementary grades he will ape the culture which he lacks and he will use long words and involved sentences — in which

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his ignorance of grammar and rhetoric will infallibly betray him. But the disguise is one which the trained detective penetrates with ease, for the man of broad culture cannot write convincingly illiterate English, and the reform school graduate cannot long imitate a style which is above his mentality. Water seeks its own level: sooner or later thought does the same. . . .

Examine the paper on which the anonymous letter is written. Is it cheap or is it expensive? Hold it up to the light and identify its watermarks. Find out the manufacturer, and find out from him which stores in the city where the letter was mailed sell that make of paper. Examine the writing: was it done with a fine-pointed pen or with a stub, with a hard pencil or with a soft one? A typewriter is no disguise: for the work of no two machines is identical. . . .

Study the sentences for constructions more usual in foreign languages; ask yourself the nationality of the writer. Study the postmarks; locate the box from which the letter was mailed: it will not be near the home of the sender. Look for fingerprints: they are valuable. Remember that you are dealing with a warped mentality: do not forget it. . . .

J. J. O'B.

From: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.,

To: Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, N. Y.

Well, you will see where I have turned back to Lesson VII, which I passed with a mark of 60.01%, which is practicly perfect, and that is because Mr. J. Harry Tefft, who is the cashier of the Surrey National Bank which they have in Surrey has come to the garage which is my office because he wants to engage my perfessional services. Eugene Dobbs is the assistant cashier at the bank, and when I saw Gene at the clam-bake they had at the Methodist church a couple of months ago, I said, "Gene, why don't you send some business my way because I will make it worth your while especially if there is something in it for me," and Gene says, "Maybe I will do that, Pete, you can never tell," and I says, "I sure wish you would, Gene," and I deducted right off that is why Mr. Tefft is here, and while I am listening to him with one ear I am thinking with the other how much do I have to pay Gene and will he take less than that.

Mr. Tefft comes in at 5:35 P.M. in the afternoon, and he is a little man with a big voice and salt and pepper hair and eyes like a couple of ice-cubes, which I put in because it shows I am observing, and he waves a envelope in the air and he stamps his foot on the floor of the garage, and he says, "Moran, I would have thrown this dammed thing in the trash-basket where it belongs because I never had anything like this happen to me before in my whole life up till today at 10 A.M. this morning; and that is what I would have done with this dammed thing only Lin which is short for

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Linett which is my wife says, 'Harry, you got to see this through to a finish,' and Reverend Sopwith who is the minister of the Congregational Church who comes in to see me every day because I am treasurer of the money he is trying to raise for the Community House which he wants to build at the corner of West Main Street where the Casino used to be before it burned down says the same, and Gene which is short for Eugene Dobbs who is the assistant cashier at the bank, says, 'Why don't you hire Pete Moran who is a private detective though he is not so hot I have heard tell to help you?' so I have brought this dammed thing with me though my natural inculation was to throw it in the trash-basket where it belongs which I may have mentioned before only I am so angry I don't remember what I said and if I was any angrier my liver would start acting up like it generally does and maybe I would be hearing from my gall-stones also, and I don't remember if I told you that when I first started to tell you about this dammed thing."

Mrs. Tefft, who weighs about two hundred and eighty pounds, and who has a box of home-made fudge under one arm and a box of marshmellows under the other says, "Harry, you did," and she eats a marshmellow, and he says, "Did what?" and she says, "Yes," and I says, "Yes," and he says, "Well, in that case," and I says, "Mrs. Tefft, won't you be seated?"

I have fixed up one corner of the garage nice with some old chairs they do not want in the big house any more, and there is a big sofa which would be comfortable only the springs are shot so they do not want that either, and I wouldn't have it in my apartment which is over the garage on a bet because it is too wide to go through the door which I found out when I measured it with a tape measure after I tried to get it through the door only it would not because it was too wide, and Mrs. Tefft says, "Thank you, Peter," and she picks out one of the arms of the sofa because there is some heavy differential grease on the other, and she sits on it and she opens the box of fudge which she makes herself in her own kitchen.

She says, "Harry, I would sit down if I were you."

"I'd rather stand."

"I would sit, Harry. Remember your liver."

So he sits, and I says, "You may perceed," which is what it says in regular detective stories with regular detectives and a dead corps and maybe some inspectors from Shetland Yard.

"Before you begin, Harry, you should tell Peter you got an excellent offer to be cashier of the 1st National Bank of Willshire, N. Y., which is a much bigger village than this village."

Mr. Tefft makes a horrible face. "That is true, Moran, but it is neither here nor there. Moran, this dammed thing came in the mails this morning."

I says, "Stop! I deduct that was Monday."

Mrs. Tefft eats a piece of fudge and she says, "You are marvellous, Peter, like it said in the Lakeville *Journal.*

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Today is Monday, and it is now 5:45 Monday afternoon, and it will be Monday all day today until midnight Eastern Standard Time when it will be Tuesday, and then it will be Tuesday for quite a spell."

I wrote that down in my note-book. "And now, Mr. & Mrs. Tefft, what seems to be the trouble?"

He makes another funny face, and Mrs. Tefft says, "Tell him, Harry, that you also got an offer to be vice-president of the new Miners & Traders Bank they are organizing in Mineville, Mass, where they have the mine."

He says, "Hush, Lin," and he gives me a postal-card and a envelope: "This post-card came in this envelope."

Well, it is a perfectly good postal-card which has not been cancelled, and it is in a envelope with a one-cent stamp which is all you need in Surrey when they just put the letters in your box and you call for them, and it has a printed address, "Mr. J. Harry Tefft, Surrey National Bank, Surrey, Conn."

Mrs. Tefft eats another marshmellow and she says, "The address is printed, Peter."

"I observed that right off."

"Reverend Sopwith had a lot of envelopes printed when he sent out that appeal for the Community House which is to be built with money raised by involuntary subscriptions, which means you give what you want and they will publish the names. He wants everybody to send the money to Mr. Tefft, who is the treasurer — though he might be the treasurer of the Security Bank & Trust Company in Little Falls, Vermont."

Mr. Tefft takes the postal-card like it was a rattlesnake, and he turns it over. "Look at it, Moran! Just look!"

Well, I looked at it, and it was printed in pencil on one side of a regular postal-card with the other side blank, and it said

SHELL OUT OR GET OUT!
PUT $500 IN THE SURREY
ELM BEFOR MUNDAY NITE
OR I WILL BEAR
YOUR PAST!
U NO HOO!

I read it over three or four times. "The card is signed 'U No Hoo,' which I deduct means 'You Know Who,' only the guy is iliterate and he does not know how to spell. Well, who is 'Hoo?' "

"Who?"

" 'Hoo?' "

"What 'who' are you talking about?"

" 'U No Hoo.' "

"But I don't, Moran."

"He says you do: the guy that wrote this card."

Mr. Tefft makes a face like he was going to blow up. "That's what I am paying you to find out, Moran. If I knew who wrote it, I would be strangling him this minute!"

Mrs. Tefft says, "Your liver, Harry, your liver!" and she eats a marshmellow.

"Do you recognize the writing, Mr. Tefft?"

"It isn't writing: it's printing."

"Well, do you recognize the printing?"

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"No, Moran, I do not."

"You have never seen this printing before?"

"Neither has anybody else, Peter," says Mrs. Tefft. "I measured it. All the letters except the 'I's and the explanation points are exactly one-quarter of an inch square, and you can see those letters were drawn by cutting a square quarter-inch hole in something and following it around with a soft pencil."

"Yes, I guess that's right."

"So you can't tell who wrote it because everybody would write like that if you gave them a quarter-inch hole and a soft pencil. I cut a hole in the joker which we don't use when we play bridge, and I copied what was written on the post-card on some paper from the score-pad. Can you tell which is which?"

I said, "No, I can not," because I couldn't.

"So all you have to do is find out who sent Mr. Tefft that card in that envelope. That should be easy."

Mr. Tefft says, "It's blackmail! Blackmail, that's what it is!"

"Yes, sir."

"Pay him $500 or he will bare my past!"

"Yes, sir, and he doesn't know how to spell 'bare.'"

"No, but he will do it anyhow."

"You mean, you don't want your past bared?"

Mrs. Tefft cuts in. "Peter, Mr. Tefft's past is like an open book."

"Yes, ma'am, but maybe there is something written in that book."

"Peter, how dare you!"

I says, "Ma'am, books generally have got something written in them excepting the cheap blank-books which you buy at the five-and-ten; and a good detective always starts by suspecting everybody, so that is the way I always start."

"Peter!"

Mr. Tefft has his say: "Don't get angry, Lin: it's just his way of talking."

"Maybe it is, but I don't like it; and besides Mr. Tefft has been offered a much better job with a bank in North Ellsworth, Conn."

"Lin! . . . Go on, Moran."

Now it is my turn. "Mr. Tefft, you know the tree they call the Surrey Elm? It is a big tree which grows in a field way past one end of the village, and they call it the Surrey Elm because once somebody hid a paper in it when they were having a war in Connecticut."

"Yes, I know the Surrey Elm."

"You do not want to put $500 in the Surrey Elm?"

"No — and I couldn't lay my hands on $500 on such short notice even if I wanted to, which I do not."

"And you do not want to get out of town either?"

Mr. Tefft makes a face and he says, "No, absolutely no."

"And you have got exactly one week to make up your mind?"

Mr. Tefft makes a worse face than before. "There is a slight misunderstanding, Moran: you mean *you* have got exactly one week to do your stuff."

Well, I am going to talk to Eugene

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Dobbs tonight, because if he hadn't recommended me Mr. Tefft would be hiring some other detective or maybe he would be getting out of town without saying anything; and I am going to talk to Reverend Sopwith, because he had the envelopes printed with Mr. Tefft's name on them; and I am going to talk to Harvey Dunn, the postmaster, who most generally knows what he shouldn't especially if you wrote it on a postal-card, and then I am going to study Lesson VII some more. There are not any watermarks on the postal-card, because I have looked and I did not see them; and it is easy to find out the manufacturer because the manufacturer is the government; and you can buy a postal-card like that anywhere and they are all alike. And after I have copied it perhaps I'll send it to you in this letter.

COLLECT NIGHT-LETTER.

PETER MORAN,

C/O MR. R. M. McRAE,

SURREY, CONN.

IF YOU HAD STUDIED LESSON VII MORE CAREFULLY YOU WOULD HAVE REMEMBERED THAT ONLY EDUCATED MEN MISSPELL WORDS STOP FIND OUT FROM WHICH MAIL-BOX LETTER WAS POSTED STOP EXAMINE POSTMARK ON ENVELOPE STOP EXAMINE ENVELOPE AND STAMP FOR FINGERPRINTS STOP ASK CLIENT TO FURNISH LIST OF HIS ENEMIES STOP IF REWARD IS SUFFICIENT WILL SEND COMPETENT MAN TO TAKE CHARGE.

CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL.

From: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.,

To: Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, N. Y.

Well, I did most of the things you said before I got the telegram, and now I have done the rest, and I certainly am glad to know only educated men mispell words because then I am educated only I wasn't positive before. And I did some things you would have suggested only you didn't think of them. I wanted to see if Mrs. Tefft was right when she says everybody will print like that if they cut a quarter-inch hole in the joker, so I cut a quarter-inch hole in the king of spades which is practicly the same because there is not any joker in my pinochle deck, and I copied the postal-card six or seven times. Of course I didn't use regular postal-cards which cost one cent apiece because that would have been expensive. I remembered Mrs. McRae has some stiff cards which are about the same size which she calls corespondent's cards, and she writes on them when her and the boss are going to throw a party, and when I looked in the living-room there was one big stack and one little stack on her desk right next to a big stack of envelopes, so I sat down in her chair and I printed out some of those cards with the king of spades. Well, it was easy, just like Mrs. Tefft said, and you couldn't tell which was which if I hadn't changed one letter in one word acidental and then I liked it and I left it that way. Then I heard the

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missus coming in the front door which is not usual when I do not hear the sound of the car first, and I didn't want her to catch me so I pushed the cards under the big stack all excepting one which I had put in my pocket, and I stood up respectful just as she says, "Peter, how lucky you are here! I want you to fix my emergency brake which I left on and now it is just ornamental not useful, and Peter I left the car on that level place near the entrance, and when you have fixed it stop back to see me because I will have a lot of letters I want you to mail tonight sure, and Peter you had better drive the car in the garage yourself which I am afraid to do with no emergency brake and you remember what Mr. McRae said the last time I hit the back wall and knocked it clear out of plum. Peter, you are always such a comfort!"

So I did what she said, and she gave me fifty or sixty letters to mail when it was mail time, and when I got to the post office, there was Harvey Dunn, the postmaster, and I says, "Harvey, what do you know about that blackmail letter?" and he says, "Shush!"

"What do you mean, 'Shush?' "

He says "Shush!" again. "Pete, we are not alone."

I looked around, and there was just the usual gang in the post-office, and they were giving the girls the glad eye and laughing and joking and swapping stories, and they were not listening. "All right, Harvey, tell me about it quiet."

He puts his lips to my ear and he whispers. "It was mailed here last Saturday afternoon."

"Saturday afternoon? Then why didn't Mr. Tefft get it Saturday night?"

"He could have, because it was in the bank's box all right — only the bank closes early on Saturdays, and if anything comes for them after the first mail they leave it lay right here till they open up again on Monday morning."

"Oh. . . Harvey, it could have been mailed Sunday."

He shakes his head. "Then it would have the Monday postmark. No, Pete: it was mailed by somebody who stopped by Saturday, after the noon whistle blew, which is when we change the noon stamp, and before the town clock struck three, which is when we change it again. Maybe he called for his own mail, and while he was doing that he slipped the envelope in at the slot where you have just been mailing all those letters."

"Harvey, who would do a low-down thing like that?"

He shrugs his shoulders. "Pete, lots of folks come here every day, and they have mailed a lot of envelopes with Mr. Tefft's name printed on them the same as this one."

"You mean you didn't notice —"

He lowers his voice some more. "I kind a blame myself, Pete. Most generally when those letters for Mr. Tefft come in I hold them up to the light to see who's giving money for the Community House and how much it is; but Saturday's my busy day. . .

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Pete, you got any ideas about this?"

"Sure; lots of them."

I said that because it is always good to keep them guessing, which I was doing myself, and after the movie was over I saw Eugene Dobbs and I gave him the high sign and he walked down the street with me.

Gene said, "Don't forget I sent you this business, Pete, and when you get the reward some of it is mine! Gosh, you could have knocked me over with a feather when Mr. Tefft showed me that card this morning! Poor old Tefft! I wonder what there is in his past that won't stand baring! One never knows."

"Gene, did you notice the postmark?"

"Sure, I looked at that right off."

I pulled out the envelope, and we looked at it together under the street-lamp at the corner of Main and West Main.

Gene turns it over. "This is the same envelope O. K.," he says, "'SURREY, APR 6, 3 PM, 1945, CONN.' Pete, it was mailed by somebody right here in this little village."

"Looks like it."

"Population 1800."

"If you count in the folks that live on the R.F.D. routes."

"Why not count them in? It was mailed by somebody out of 1800 people: all you got to do is find out which."

I thought that over. "Gene, did you see any suspicious looking people in the post-office when you went there Saturday afternoon?"

"No — because I didn't go there. The bank is foreclosing a mortgage they got in Canaan, and first thing in the morning Mr. Tefft told me to go to Canaan to talk to the lawyer about it. I phoned Mr. Tefft when I got there — I guess by then it was 11:30, because the lawyer wanted to ask him some questions — and then I had lunch with the lawyer, and he blew me to a movie after that and he bought me some drinks in the tap-room they have got in the Berkshire Inn, and one thing led to another and I had to step on the gas all the way home because I was late for supper."

I thought that over, also. I says, "Gene, you got any idea who wrote that card? Who is 'U No Hoo?' "

He looks around, so he can be sure there is nobody overhearing, and then he lowers his voice. "Pete, you mean to say you haven't guessed it yet?"

"No."

"Pete, think hard!"

"I have been doing that ever since 5:35 P.M. this afternoon, and all I got so far is a headache."

"Pete, I'm your friend or I wouldn't have sent you this business which is so simple a child could tell you the answer. Pete, who wants Mr. Tefft to get out of Surrey?"

"'U No Hoo.' "

"Right. But who is 'U No Hoo?' Who wants him to move to Little Falls, Vermont — or Mineville, Mass — or North Ellsworth, Connecticut — or Wilshire, New York — and who doesn't care what she does if she can

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get him to shake the dust of this village from his feet?"

"Gosh!"

"Who visits the post-office regular three times a day because she says the walking makes her tired and she always stops in next door for a chocolate ice-cream soda before and after?"

"Gene, it looks like you got hold of something!"

"Look into it, Pete, but don't mention my name. Somebody has got to put poor old Tefft wise, only I don't want to be the fellow to do it. I'm really fond of the silly old duffer, Pete. Understand?"

"Sure."

"So long, Pete."

"So long, Gene."

Sometimes it is nice to have friends like Gene Dobbs.

I walked by the Congregational Church, and it was dark, but there was a light in the parsonage which is next door. I looked in, and I observed Reverend Sopwith was sitting at his desk, and I observed he had a joker on a piece of paper and he was writing with a pencil.

I watched a while, and then I walked around to the front door and I knocked and he let me in.

Reverend Sopwith is a young man with yellow hair and a jaw that sticks right out, and he is light on his feet and he never wears those collars that button up the wrong way, and the first time I saw him I thought he was a prize-fighter.

He says, "As I live, Peter! There is more rejoicing in heaven over the one sinner that repenteth than over the seven that kept their lamps burning all night," or something like that.

I says, "Thank you, Reverend, but I have come here on business: the detecting business."

He says, "Oh, I forgot you are the village sleuth."

"That card somebody sent Mr. Tefft —"

He says, "Ah!"

"Who do you think sent him that card, Reverend?"

He says, "Blessed if I know. There are those that do good by stealth, and there are also those that do their dirty work by hook or crook. But Peter, don't stand in the doorway where it is cold and I will have to stoke up the furnace which I have banked for the night. Come in my study, and sit over the register, and light your pipe if that is what you would like."

I walked in and I walked right over to his desk where there is a joker with a quarter-inch hole in it. I says, "Reverend, what is this? What have you been writing through this quarter-inch hole?"

"See for yourself, Peter."

I looked, and he had been writing cards, "GOD IS LOVE," "IT IS MORE B. TO G. THAN TO R.," B. ARE THE P. IN H.," etc, etc.

He says, "Peter, it is easy, just like Mrs. Tefft said, and they are all alike, which anybody will admit. Here are a dozen cards. I printed some. Mrs. Sopwith printed some. My little son Junior who is just turning eight printed one, and not even Daniel and

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all his lions would know which is which if Junior hadn't been eating chocolate cake and he smeared some here in the corner."

I says, "Reverend, did you send that card to Mr. Tefft?"

"You mean, did *I* write the blackmail note asking for $500?"

"That's the idea."

"I did not; but what makes you think I might have done it, Peter?"

"You need money for the Community House."

"I do, Peter, and you have never spoken a truer word. I need money, and I would do almost anything to raise that money, but Mr. Tefft is a poor man and would not have $500 kicking around in ready cash, so I did not write that letter."

"Reverend, where were you last Saturday between 12 o'clock which is noon and 3 P.M. the same afternoon?"

"In Winsted, Peter, because that was where I preached last Sunday. I exchanged pulpits with the Winsted minister who preached here, which you would have known if you attended church more regular."

"You went to Winsted which is not so very far away on Saturday because you were going to preach Sunday?"

"I was born in Winsted, Peter. We had lunch with my father and mother, who live in Winsted, and we had an early supper because we wanted to put Junior to bed before it got too dark. Why are you asking?"

"I have started out by suspecting everybody, Reverend, and I am up a tree."

"The Surrey Elm?"

"I guess that's it, Reverend."

He laughs. "Zaccheus was up a tree also, Peter, and he was lucky."

I says, "Maybe Zaccheus was a real inspector from Shetland Yard which I am not."

I went home, and the missus was out at a party which the Hamiltons were throwing, so I looked for the cards I wrote and which I slipped under the big stack of cards, but they were not there, and the big stack was gone, too. So I thought a while, and then I went back to the garage where I have got my workshop, and while I was working I figured out how I would solve some other case, because this case is a hard one and maybe I had better skip it.

COLLECT TELEGRAM.
PETER MORAN,
C/O MR. R. B. McRAE,
SURREY, CONN.

WHERE IS ENVELOPE ON WHICH THERE MUST BE FINGERPRINTS QUESTION MARK WHY HAVE YOU NOT OBTAINED LIST OF ENEMIES FROM CLIENT QUESTION MARK HOW MUCH REWARD IS CLIENT OFFERING QUESTION MARK MUST HAVE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS PARTICULARLY LAST ONE.
CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL.

From: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.,
To: Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, N. Y.

Yes, there will be fingerprints on

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the envelope, my fingerprints, and Mr. T's fingerprints, and Mrs. T's fingerprints, and Harvey Dunn's fingerprints, and a lot more, I guess, but the fingerprints which will not be there will be the fingerprints of the man who mailed that envelope because if he was careful he would wear gloves; and if you didn't find his fingerprints on the postal-card which I sent you I guess you will not find them on the envelope either. And the first thing I did when I got your telegram was to telephone Mr. Tefft at the bank. I says, "Mr. Tefft, is it safe to talk to you personal on this line?"

He says, "Sure. There's nobody listening excepting the telephone central and maybe a couple of busybodies on the other telephones but nobody believes anything they say anyhow so go right ahead."

"Very well, then. Mr. Tefft, I would like you to make out a list of your enemies."

He kind of gives a sigh. "My enemies?"

"Haven't you got any?"

"Yes, I got a few. But which enemies do you want? Do you want the enemies in Surrey township, or in Litchfield County, or in the state of Connecticut, or in New England, or in the whole United States excepting insular possessions and the Panama Canal?"

"I guess I'd like a list of all your enemies everywhere."

"Well, I'll see what I can do about it. I'll get started on it during the lunch hour, and I'll bring it to you as soon as I finish it."

I says, "That will be nice, and don't forget to put in their addresses," and this afternoon he stopped by and he gave me eleven sheets of typed paper.

He says, "These are my enemies from A to Conkling, J., errors and omissions excepted. Tomorrow morning bright and early I am going to begin with the enemies from Conkling, Leonard, Conkling, Leroy, and Conkling, Lewis, and maybe I will get as far as the F's before I call it a day."

I looked at the list, which starts with Abbott, Acton, Adams, A., Adams, Albert W., Adams, B., Adams, Charles, and Adams, Daniel G., and I says, "Mr. Tefft, how come you have got so many enemies?"

He makes one of his faces. "I have worked for banks all my life. Those are the men that wanted money, only I said 'No.'"

"Speaking of money, Mr. Tefft, what do I get if I find out who sent you that blackmail letter?"

He looks at me out of those ice-cube eyes, and he says, "How much money do you want?"

I thought that over. "Meaning you will say 'No?'"

"I wouldn't be surprised, Moran. The 'No' is kind of automatic with bank cashiers, or I would be looking for a job this minute. You may safely leave the reward to my generosity."

"I hate to leave things that way."

"So do I, and when I come to the Morans in the list of my enemies I will have to put down 'Moran, P.,'

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but it is lucky for us that 'M' is in the middle of the alphabet where I will not get until next week, and maybe 'U No Hoo' will have bared my past before then meaning all bets are off."

He sees something I have been working on on my workbench, and he says, "Hello! I didn't know you were a trapper," and I says, "That is a muskrat trap I am repairing for Silas Birdsall who catches muskrats," and he sighs and he says, "Silas Birdsall: he's on my list, and his rich brother Abner, also."

So there was no use talking with him any more, and while I was watching Mr. Tefft drive away I heard the missus calling, and she says, "Peter, are you quite sure you mailed all those letters I gave you to mail Monday night, there were more than 60 of them?"

I says, "Yes, Mrs. McRae."

"Well, I don't understand it, because I met Mr. Seymour taking a long walk this afternoon and I said, 'You'll be coming to our cocktail party, won't you?' and Mr. Seymour said, 'No, I wasn't invited,' and I said, 'How perfectly ridiculous, why, of course you were invited, we wouldn't dream of giving a party without you, you must be sure to come or we will be dreadfully dissapointed,' and Mr. Seymour said, 'I will come if I feel considerably better, but I might as well tell you that I am pretty low in my spirits at this moment.' "

I says, "Mrs. McRae, I don't understand it either, especially because that Mr. Seymour is such a jolly old gentleman and he flirts with the female help every chance he gets."

She says, "Oh, does he? Well, never mind if he does because he is getting along in years and age has its privi-ledges, but Peter, you are positive about the letters, aren't you, all 60 of them?"

"Well, I didn't count the letters, Mrs. McRae . . ."

"No, there was no reason for you to do that."

". . . but I guess there were about 60, and I distincly remember mailing them because you can't put letters in that little slot at the post-office more than five or six at a time which I did until there were not any left over, and besides Harvey Dunn the postmaster saw me mailing those letters and he mentioned it."

She says, "You know, Peter, I trust you," and then the next day, which is today, she says, "Peter, that invitation I wrote out for Miss Oliphant must have gone a stray also, because I saw her for a minute in the village, and I said, 'Hello, Susan, I am counting on you for Sunday,' and she gave me a simply murderous look and then she walked right on without saying anything, and later, at the hairdresser's, they told me Miss Oliphant is leaving Surrey in a big hurry tomorrow morning to go to China, and she doesn't care if she rents her house or not which is strange for Miss Oliphant because she is generally very thrifty in money matters. What do you make of that, Peter?"

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"I don't know, Mrs. McRae. Doesn't she write books, and didn't she use to travel all over the world being a war corespondent?"

"Yes, Peter, but why should she be so unfriendly to me?"

"She is a very queer person, Mrs. McRae, and I have heard stories about her which I would not repeat in the presence of a real lady."

The missus laughs, and she has a nice kind of a laugh, which is high and silvery, and it is all you can do to listen to her without laughing yourself. "Peter, some day you will be the death of me! Are you trying to tell me Miss Oliphant has a past? Of course she has a past, which is true of many briliant men and women; but why is she leaving the village on such short notice? It is only a week since she was talking to me about the seedlings she was going to plant the moment the frost is out of the ground."

I started to say, "Maybe she would not like somebody to bare her past," and then all of a sudden I was cold all over and I could not get out a word, because sometimes I get brain-storms and I remembered how I copied Mr. Tefft's postal-card on Mrs. McRae's corespondent's cards, and while I have got one of those cards in my inside breast pocket this minute, maybe the missus put the others in those envelopes that were ready for the invitations to the cocktail party, and she gave them to me and I mailed them. And that would explain why Mr. Seymour was so low in his spirits and why Miss Oliphant was packing up in such a hurry and why she did not like Mrs. McRae any more especially if she recognized Mrs. McRae's handwriting on the envelope.

The missus says, "Peter, finish what you were saying," but I says, "No, Mrs. McRae, it was just something that got stuck in my throat," and now I have finished this letter to you, and maybe you had better send a regular detective quick because I am in for a whole lot of trouble and if Miss Oliphant wants a good chauffeur maybe I will volunteer to go to China with her. And the answer to your question "if reward is sufficient" is I do not think it will be especially if it has to be split with you and Eugene Dobbs.

COLLECT TELEGRAM.
PETER MORAN,
C/O MR. R. B. McRAE,
SURREY, CONN.
NO HONEY NO FLIES NO MONEY NO DETECTIVES THE END.
CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL.

From: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.,
To: Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, N. Y.

You could have knocked me flat when your telegram came and the Lakeville operator read it to me over the telephone Sunday morning because I felt like I lost my best friend and I studied Lesson VII some more only it didn't help. So then I got out

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my bicycle and I went to the village because I wanted to talk to Mr. Tefft or Eugene Dobbs or Harvey Dunn or somebody, and there was Reverend Sopwith just coming out of his parsonage.

He hollers, "Good morning, Peter."

I stopped right there. I says, "Reverend, I need advice. I need advice real bad."

"Peter, if you wish to consult me you will have to sit through the sermon first, and if you put a button in the plate I will pin back your ears with my one-two punch and that is a promise and no idle jest."

So I listened to his sermon which was all about the wicked flea which no man pursueth, and then after he went around to the door and shook hands with everybody who was in the church, he says, "Peter, spill it," and I spilled it, telling him everything that has happened since 5:35 P.M. last Monday afternoon, when Mr. & Mrs. J. Harry Tefft first drove up to the garage. I did not leave out anything, and I told him what I have done and what I have said and what everybody else has said, though I would like to forget a lot of it if I could only I can not.

He listens, and he says, "Peter, at the moment I am frankly at a loss, but I shall seek the guidance of the Lord in prayer which I advise you to do the same, and you might also come back this evening for the prayer meeting which begins at 7:30 and perhaps guidance will come to you while you're there."

I says, "Do I have to put another nickel in the plate?"

He says, "Peter, do whatever your conscience tells you," so I says, "Reverend, then you can depend on me to be there," so after it is over he says, "Peter, did the guidance come?"

"Not yet, Reverend."

"Well, Peter, something came to me though I don't know how good it is yet. How would you like to return in a couple of hours — say at ten-thirty tonight — bringing with you the little gadget on which you were so opportunely working for Silas Birdsall?"

"What little gadget?" I says, and then it comes back to me. "What on earth do you want with that, Reverend?"

"Bring it and you will see."

I says, "O. K.," and then when I stop by at ten-thirty like he told me, he says, "Peter, I think we will go for a brisk stroll."

"Is that what the guidance told you to do, Reverend?"

"Yes, Peter."

I wrote you how I thought Reverend Sopwith was a prize-fighter the first time I saw him, and before we were half way through that stroll I deducted he kept himself in pretty good condition because I was ready to throw in the sponge and he was talking all the time and he was not even breathing hard.

He says, "Peter, did you notice who came to the cocktail party this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"The usual crowd, I suppose?"

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"Yes, sir."

"But there were some absentees?"

"What do you mean, Reverend?"

"Some you would expect to see at the McRaes' parties but who didn't put in an appearance?"

"Yes, sir, I guess there were some like that."

We are walking up a hill now, and the going is tough, but the Reverend is fresh as a daisy. "Who wasn't there — and is usually there?"

"Well, Miss Oliphant."

"Yes, she is on her way to China already. How about Mr. Seymour?"

"He didn't show up."

"Not even after his special invitation? Who else?"

"Mr. Grimshaw was not there."

"The financier?"

"Yes, sir . . . Mr. & Mrs. Thorndike."

"His third wife divorced him and then he ran away with the second wife of his best friend, didn't he?"

"Something like that, sir."

"You have mentioned four names. We could probably collect more without difficulty, Peter, though there is no reason why a man who has received a threatening letter should not attend a cocktail party — unless, as you have suggested, some of Mrs. McRae's good friends recognized her handwriting on the envelopes. That might create a psychological obstacle, as you doubtless understand." He stops walking, and I am mighty glad to stop and catch my breath on a stone wall that is handy. "Peter, have you any idea where we are?"

We have walked four or five miles, I guess, but we have turned back, and we are getting near the south end of the village. "Are you lost, Reverend?" I ask him.

He is lighting his pipe, and I can see him smile. "I am never lost, Peter, for the Lord is my guide. That is a big open field ahead of us, and if I am not greatly mistaken the large dark object in the center of the field is the Surrey Elm. It is a fine night, and I can see it plainly by the light of the moon. You told me, Peter — correct me if I am wrong — that when you copied the original blackmail note you changed one letter in one word?"

"It was accidental, Reverend."

"Providential, you mean. Having a natural instinct for correct spelling, and being put out because the blackmailer did not know how to spell the names of the days of the week, you changed 'Munday' to 'Sunday.' By doing so you advanced the deadline given in the original note twenty-four hours. Peter, did you hear the village clock strike? It is now after midnight, and Sunday night is over. Do you think anybody would object if we investigated the Surrey Elm?"

"Why, who would object, Reverend?"

"Indeed, who, Peter?" We walk across the field to the tree, and the Reverend has thought of everything, because he has a torch in his pocket and he turns it on. "A noble tree with a noble history, Peter. Poems are made by fools like me —"

"Reverend, you are no fool."

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"I was reciting poetry, Peter . . . but only God can make a — Why, hello! What's this?"

"What is it, Reverend?"

"There seems to be a envelope in the tree. Here, hold it, Peter. As I live, there seems to be another — and a third!"

"Keep going, Reverend!"

He flashes his torch in the hollow. "Three is all, but who are we to complain? As nearly as we can estimate, you sent out six letters. Judging by the contents of the envelopes which I have already examined — you had better give me the first and let me examine that also — three of them have brought in munificent contributions. Peter, that is batting .500, which is better than I can do, and believe it or not, they gave me a prize for English composition in the cemetery where I graduated! And now, Peter, since there is no good reason why any other person should investigate this tree, on which I think I will hang a banner CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE COMMUNITY HOUSE THANKFULLY RECEIVED, you might hand me that little object you have so thoughtfully brought along. How are we going to fasten it in?"

Well, the idea which the Reverend had, only I did not tell you what it was because I did not know what it was myself, was to put the muskrat trap I have been repairing for Silas Birdsall in the hollow in the tree, only the Reverend is not a practicle man and first off he says, "Peter, what is there to prevent the muskrat from walking off with the trap?" and I have to tell him there is a good answer to that question or muskrat skins would be selling for more than they are which they are not.

I gave him the trap and the chain which is fastened to the trap and a lag-screw which you can put through the ring in the end of the chain if that is what you want.

"Have you brought a spanner wrench to drive the screw home, Peter?"

"No, sir, I didn't think of it; but that wood is rotted, and you can hammer it in with a stone. Here is a stone."

"Thank you, Peter."

"Do you want me to set the trap for you, Reverend?"

"It would be wise to do that, Peter. . . ."

We walked back to the village.

The Reverend says, "Three paid. One ran away. Two sat tight. I would like to think that those two had no pasts and had led blameless lives, but my experience as a minister of the Gospel has taught me we must not expect too much of human nature."

"Reverend, what are we going to do with the money?"

"The Community House, Peter: yours will be a noble contribution, and the persons who placed those envelopes in the tree will not ask to have them returned. And tomorrow night —"

Well, we went back there last night, which was Monday night, and while we were still a long way off we could

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see somebody standing next to the Surrey Elm, and he was not standing quiet, either.

The Reverend says, "We have caught a woodchuck, or a muskrat, or a skunk, or something. I wonder who the skunk can be?"

I says, "I do not know, Reverend, because the light is not so good."

He says, "Has it not struck you that here in this little village where everybody knows you got to put a three-cent stamp on a letter if you mail it in a R. F. D. box, there is one man who told you that letter to Mr. Tefft which has a one-cent stamp on it could have been mailed by anybody out of 1800 people?"

I thought that over. "Your statement is correct, Reverend, and no, it has not struck me why he told me a fool thing like that."

The Reverend pokes me in the ribs. "Perhaps he was fool enough to think he was making things harder for you because you would not catch on."

"But I did catch on!"

"Of course you caught on!"

We walk up to the tree, and there he is, with his fingers caught in the trap; and I guess it hurts a lot, because his shoulders are heaving, and his face is pale, and when he sees us he says, "Help! For God's sake, help!"

I says, "Not so fast, Gene. What were you doing at this tree?"

"Trying to save Tefft's money for him. But help —"

"Did Mr. Tefft put money there? Let me look!"

The Reverend turned his torch into the hollow, and I could see Gene Dobbs' fingers caught in the trap, but I could not see any envelope.

I says, "Gene, you're lying!"

"All right, then, I'm lying. But open the trap, Pete! I'm in agony!"

"I can't open it till I get it out because I can't get my hands past your arm. I got to take out this lag-screw first."

"Take it out — quick! Hurry!"

"I'll need a spanner wrench to do that. Look here, Gene: I'll run to the village as fast as I can, and I'll get one. I ought to be back inside of half an hour."

He sort of keels over against my shoulder when he hears that, and I can see his face is white as a sheet. "Pete, half an hour more of this and I'll go crazy! . . . I'm near crazy already! . . . Pete, there's a wrench in my right-hand coat pocket — only I can't reach it. . . . Be quick, Pete!"

Well, I get out the wrench, and it is the kind you buy at the five-and-ten, where you get four little double-ended spanners bolted together with a bolt through a hole that is punched through the middle of the spanners, so you can take them apart if you want, or if you don't want to take them apart, you can work them around and use any size you like. I pick out the spanner that will fit, and I pull out the bolt, and then I see there is a square quarter-inch hole through the middle of that spanner, and when the Reverend shines his torch on it, he whistles, and he says, "Peter, do you see those black marks

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on the inside of the square hole?"

"Yes, sir. What about them?"

"Nothing — only they could have been made by a soft lead pencil in the hands of a man who was writing what he expected would be an anonymous letter."

"That is so, Reverend, and now that you mention it, I will say it is exactly what was in my mind but I did not tell you because my mind works like that and I expected he would be using the king of spades or maybe the joker."

"Bully for you, Peter!"

I turn to Gene. "Take a look at the pencil marks, Gene! Here, Reverend, shine the light on them so he can see them real good!"

He knows when the game is up. "All right, you win. I wanted to get rid of the silly old duffer so I could move up and get his job —"

"But you were out of town Saturday afternoon when the letter was mailed —"

"The boy goes to the post-office with the mail bag which always hangs in the bank. I knew if I put the letter in it in the morning he would mail it with the rest."

And then something hits me sudden and hits me hard: "Gene, why did you tell Mr. Tefft to hire me when he got the blackmail letter which you wrote?"

"Because — because I figured that if there was one detective in the world who wouldn't catch the guilty man, it was you, Pete. . . ." And then he faints dead away, and after we get him loose we got to wait till he comes to before we can start walking him back to the village. . . .

Mr. Tefft says, "No scandal, please! No scandal! He is willing to leave town today. Let him go — quietly!"

I says, "Yes, sir."

"Moran, since this case looked so easy, I had planned to reward you with a book with some war-savings stamps pasted in it. Reverend Sopwith has told me that it was more difficult than I had expected, and that you had to make various cash outlays. I am going to give you a War Bond instead."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir."

The Reverend says, "Peter, do you ever read the Bible?"

"No, sir."

"It says one must not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn. You have handled this case so brilliantly that nobody could call you an ox, but after I telephoned the trustees we agreed you should have ten percent for your pains."

I am working out now how much is ten percent of $1500, and when I get the answer I will let you know how much it is, and that is what you could have divided with me if you had not wired, "No Honey, No Flies;" so first I am going to take the half which you could have had, and then I am going to take the other half which is mine and the War Bond because that is mine also. The Reverend says, "To him that hath shall be given," and I guess he knows what he is talking about.

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The gifted author of ONE MORE SPRING *and* THE ENCHANTED VOYAGE *is most popularly known for his delightful and delicate fantasy. While irony subtly underlies most of Robert Nathan's work, it emerges full-blast in "A Death in the Stadium" — a devastating satire compressed into a mere 1200 words.*

The phrase "mass murder" means murder of the many. "A Death in the Stadium" is not concerned with mass murder — at least, not in the usual sense. But can't the term also be applied to murder by *the many? Or is that, more accurately, a case of "mass murderer"? In any event, here is a rare and curious and unorthodox example of murder by the many, acidly etched by one of your Editor's favorite literary artists.*

A DEATH IN THE STADIUM

by ROBERT NATHAN

MY FRIEND approached me with these words: "How are you?" Before I could reply, he exclaimed: "I am on my way to attend the public death of Principus, the great actor, at the stadium. Come, we will go together, for it is sure to be an interesting spectacle." And he added: "He was the greatest actor in the world."

I turned and went with him, for I had heard of this affair. Indeed, it seemed as if the whole city were hurrying in that direction; nevertheless, we managed to squeeze ourselves into the subway. As we jogged slowly uptown, with many stops and waits, my friend told me a little more about Principus, whose death was convulsing the entire nation. "He was a great lover," said my friend; "he always played the part of the hero. Now he is dying; with a showman's instinct, and also in order to provide for his family, he has determined to die in public, comforted during his last moments by the groans of his admirers."

It was a peaceful evening; the rooftops of the city towered upward into the sky stained by the sunset and lighted by a few pale stars. The great actor lay dying in a field ordinarily given over to prize-fights or baseball, and rented for this occasion; the seats which rose in concrete tiers all about him were entirely filled, while crowds of men and women at the gates gazed with gloomy interest at the ushers, who gazed back at them with a lofty expression.

After some delay, due to the crowds, we bought our tickets, and also two small straw mats to sit on, and ascended to our seats. Next to us sat an Englishman, an acquaintance of my friend. "How do you do?" he said; "this is extraordinary."

The death-bed was in the center of the field, under a bright light, and

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surrounded by doctors, nurses, reporters, and newspaper photographers. We were a little late; when we arrived, the mayor had already been there: assisted by the doctors, he had given Principus the first injection of strychnine, after which he had retired amid applause. Thereafter the dying man had received visits from the Fire Commissioner, a committee from the Actor's Equity, three State senators, and a Mr. Meely, of Hollywood. The President of the United States had been invited, and had sent a small cake.

The audience gazed at the dying man with anxious enthusiasm. Now and then a sigh, like a gust of wind on a hill, rippled up and down the aisles where vendors of lemonade, peanuts, sausages, and pennants moved about, calling their wares. On the pennants, which were arranged with black mourning borders, were printed names of the most important plays in which Principus had taken the part of hero. Spectators bought their favorites, and waved them at the dying man.

"Ah!" they cried. "Oh!"

"Principus."

"Don't let them kill you."

And they shouted advice, interspersed with jeers at the doctors.

Suddenly, in the row in front of us, a man stood up, and turned around to glare at me. "I am a friend of his," he exclaimed with energy. "I am also a member of the Rotary Club of Syracuse, N. Y. Who are you pushing?"

"Nobody," I answered firmly; and after some hesitation he sat down again.

The Englishman gave me a gloomy glance. "The trouble with America," he said, "is that you do nothing original. This reminds me of the ancient festivals at Rome under Diocletian. You are always borrowing something. Why don't you strike out for yourself?"

He had hardly finished speaking when a woman rose in her seat in a far corner of the stadium, gave a scream and fell forward on her face. At once there was a rush for her, she was lifted up, examined by some police matrons, photographed, and her name and address taken; after which she was carried out, with an expression of satisfaction on her face. A moment later, in another part of the great circle, another woman repeated this performance. She also was photographed and carried out, looking very pleased. As a result of this incident, all over the stadium women rose screaming, and fell in various attitudes, some with their noses pointed to the sky, others on their stomachs. These, however, were left where they fell, and presently got up again and sat down, waving their flags.

"You Americans," said the Briton, "you are like everybody else. Why should I watch this sort of thing, which was done very much better by the Druids in England centuries ago?" And leaning forward with a strained expression, he shouted: "Look here, are you going to die, or not?"

The sick actor lay gazing at his

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public with weary eyes. In the bright light above his bed, he looked pale and thin; I wondered how it felt to die. The doctors moved anxiously about the bedside, conferring with the nurses and with each other; but they did not seem to agree with each other, or to notice the cheers with which the audience greeted each bulletin, regardless of its content.

An hour later extras were for sale in the aisles. "Woman Swoons at Principus Death," shouted the newsboys. "All about the big death." These editions already had photographs of the first woman to faint, whose pet name was Pinky. The Englishman bought one.

"We also," he observed, "have women in England.

"They have also been known to faint."

The man in front of us looked back angrily. "This is the largest death," he said, "there has ever been."

"It is a triumph," agreed my friend.

All at once a hush fell upon the stadium. All eyes were directed at the doctors; huddled around the bedside of the dying actor, they made it plain by their expressions that a crisis had arrived. The audience held its breath; the lemonade-vendors were silent. At last the head doctor stepped back, and held up his hand. Pale, but with a noble look, he exclaimed: "He will live."

A few cheers broke out, but they were immediately drowned in a storm of hisses. Men and women rose to their feet; flags were waved, peanuts, sausages, and pop bottles were hurled at the doctors and at the dying man. "We want to see him die," shouted the crowds who had bought tickets for this event. Led by the two women who had been photographed, they broke into jeers and catcalls.

"Cowards," they shrieked; "idiots."

"Let us have some new doctors."

The dying man raised himself wearily; he seemed to be searching for the sky, already dark with night. His eyes scanned with amazement the stormy sea of faces around him and above him. The desire of so many people for his death descended upon him in an overwhelming compulsion, fell upon him in an irresistible wave; with a sigh he lay down and died. At once flashlights went off, a procession was formed with Pinky at the head, and pieces of the bed were broken off for souvenirs. Several men threw their hats into the air; and an old woman, who happened to fall down in the excitement, was trampled upon.

"We also die in England," said the Englishman bitterly. "Can't you be original?"

And he went home, first stopping to buy a small piece of cotton cloth from the death-sheet of Principus, the world's greatest lover.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Robert Nathan wrote "A Death in the Stadium" in 1927. Is Mr. Nathan a seer, a prophet, a soothsayer? Did Mr. Nathan anticipate by nearly fifteen years the swoon-hysteria of the Frank Sinatra bobby-soxers? The next time your Editor meets Mr. Nathan we won't dare show him our palm — he might read it!*

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At the time of this writing Stuart Palmer is Major Stuart Palmer, U. S. Army, War Department censor for Hollywood scripts and pictures. Also at the time of this writing Major Palmer is visiting Europe, as the official dragoman for a group of Hollywood bigshots. Via Army air-transports Stu and the heads of all the major film studios are visiting the scene of the world's greatest crime, inspecting the scarred and bloody corpse of a murdered continent — the bomb-torn capitals, the gruesome concentration camps, the now silent, deathly silent, battlefields. It is a miracle that prior to a mission of such magnitude, Major Palmer found time and heart to write a new Hildegarde Withers story; such are the safety-valves that permit life to go on. . . .

Further comments after you have finished reading "The Riddle of the Black Museum."

THE RIDDLE OF THE BLACK MUSEUM

by STUART PALMER

MR. HUBERT HOLCOMB lay on his back in a cleared space at the far end of the long narrow cellar room, beyond the lines of shelves with their dusty, grim exhibits. The flashbulbs exploded almost in his face, but Holcomb did not mind. He did not even blink, for he had been dead since early that afternoon. Between two and three, the assistant medical examiner thought.

There were a number of plain-clothesmen around the body. Inspector Oscar Piper, looking more than ever like a graying, housebroken leprechaun, surveyed the remains without visible enthusiasm. Then he looked carefully all around on the stone floor, not that he expected to find anything. But it was up to the skipper of the Homicide squad to act as if he knew what he was doing. Besides, it gave him time to think.

But there didn't seem to be any clues. Nothing, that is, except the long rope of cunningly-woven fine black silk which was still looped once around the dead man's neck, the ends extending for more than four feet in either direction, like an over-length skating scarf.

The Inspector relighted his dead cigar and said, "Identification done?"

Blunt-faced Sergeant Hardesty nodded. "Preliminary. From papers in his pocket. Social Security stuff, letters, all like that. He's Hubert Holcomb, age 58, lives 422 East 73rd Street, Manhattan."

"He used to be headwaiter or something like that at the old Hotel Grande," put in another detective.

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"What'd the doc have to say?"

"He was strangled, Doc Fink says. A slow, nasty job. No fracture of the vertebrae or the hyoid bone."

The Inspector nodded sagely and looked at his watch. Then he turned toward the door, which stood at the other end of the narrow central corridor, and his normally crisp and rasping voice swelled to a roar. "Breck!"

The door opened and a sweating young patrolman, new to the Bureau, poked in his blank, reddish face. "Yes, Inspector?"

"Any messages?"

"No, sir. Only word to call the Commissioner when it's convenient."

Piper winced. He had already talked to the Commissioner, or at least listened to him. "Was there nobody else? I was expecting another message."

"No, sir. There were some newspaper guys outside, but I gave 'em the bum's rush. Then there were the usual nuts who always try to get to the scene of a crime. Rubberneck stuff. One in particular — I thought I'd never brush her off, but I managed it."

"Good, good," commended the Inspector absently. Then he turned. "Just a minute, Breck. By any chance was this nut you brushed off a sort of angular, middle-aged dame?"

Breck smiled. "I guess you musta had trouble with her before, huh? Yeah, she was about that. Weight around 135, height five nine. . . ."

"Never mind that. Was she wearing a hat that looked like it had been made by somebody who had heard of hats but never actually seen one? Did she have a face like Whirlaway's mother?"

"Why — yeah, I mean yes, sir. But don't worry. I told her you were busy with a homicide, and couldn't be disturbed. So she's gave up by now."

Piper sighed. "That lady happens to be a special side-kick of mine. I've been trying to get hold of her all afternoon. She wouldn't give up, no matter what you said. So go find her, fast!"

It turned out that the unhappy officer had only to open the hall door, and Miss Hildegarde Withers sailed in, glaring one of her best glares at the Inspector. "Really! I hardly expected —" Then she saw where she was. "Oscar, this is the Black Museum!"

"So what? It's one hell of a place to have a murder committed, right here across the street from Headquarters. Fine publicity it will make!"

"Fine indeed," agreed the schoolteacher absently. She came slowly along the narrow passage between the crowded shelves, her eyes bulging at the accumulation of gruesome relics. She looked upon knives and swords and hatchets, curved scimitars and straight razors, saw-edged krisses and stilettos with long needle points. There were automatics and revolvers, great horse-pistols which a man could hardly lift with one hand, tiny derringers which could slip out of sight up a gambler's sleeve, antique blunderbusses and modern shotguns, rifles with barrels as long as a tall man and chased with silver.

There were ropes and infernal machines, hammers and blackjacks and

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sashweights and hatpins, and a hundred other articles the exact use of which one might only imagine. But the general effect was all too clear. She stood among a thousand weapons, each of which was collected here in this room because it had done a man to death. Here was Manhattan's version of the world-famous Black Museum at New Scotland Yard, with an American accent.

"Mercy me!" said the maiden schoolma'am. "Look at all the dust and spiderwebs, too. Makes one want to get busy with a broom!"

Piper lowered his voice, so that the detectives at the farther end of the room could not hear. "Makes me want to get out of here," he confided. "Just a minute, Hildegarde. The body is back there. But before you have a look, let me fill in the picture. At two o'clock this afternoon three men were admitted to this place. They were all strangers to each other, all very interested in having a look at the Black Museum. The attendant in charge was called away to the phone on some routine matter, and while he was gone it happened — apparently an impromptu job. As he came back he heard somebody yelling for help and pounding on the door, which he had locked from the outside. When he got in he found that Holcomb was strangled, and each of the survivors was pointing at the other and screaming "He did it! I saw him!"

Miss Withers sniffed. "That simplifies our problem. Only two suspects."

"Yeah, it simplifies things to the point where I'm about to get rousted out of the Force. Because the Commissioner hit the ceiling. He's given me until six P.M. tomorrow to solve this thing, or else accept indefinite suspension without pay. And it's a physical impossibility to solve it. The killer was smart enough to tell exactly the same story as the innocent bystander. And you can't break it from motive, because Holcomb was a little nonentity whom nobody could have had reason to bump."

"So far as we know," Miss Withers reminded him gently.

"Yeah. So I sent for you because — well, two or three times in the past you managed to stumble on the truth, with your blind luck, and —"

"Blind luck!" echoed the schoolteacher indignantly. "I stumbled, did I? Well —"

But whatever else she was about to say was lost as Miss Hildegarde Withers found herself staring down at the body of the rotund little old man with the polished bald head, the face still purplish and distorted, the silken rope around his neck. "Oh, dear!" gasped Miss Withers, and turned away.

"What we figure happened," Piper continued, "is that when the attendant went out of the room, the three visitors split up and went wandering around looking at what interested them. Holcomb came back here, and one of the others followed him, snatched up that noose, and had him strangled before the other man knew about it or could do anything."

"I see." Miss Withers was peering at

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a nearby exhibit, consisting of a champagne bottle, the base of which had been smashed into jagged shards, now tipped with brownish-black stains. The card propped before it read: *Bottle used by Stanik Bard in murder of Hyman Kinch, Hotel Grande Ballroom, October 1921.*

"Now if you want to see the attendant —" Piper was saying.

"I would rather see the card. All the exhibits have cards. If the murderer reached up and grabbed the most convenient weapon, namely the noose, then where is the card?"

The Inspector demanded of his detectives if any of them had seen a card on the floor. Nobody had. Everybody looked. But it was Miss Withers who first gave tongue above the quarry, perhaps because she started looking at the end of the room farthest from the corpse and nearest the door. The card, still in its place, read: *Assassin's noose, Moslem origin, used by Ab-el-Harun in murder of Mary Malone, Central Park, August 1917.*

"I remember that case," the Inspector was beginning. "I saw him burned, too —"

Miss Withers looked at him, and sniffed. "Oscar, I think I've seen enough of this place. It seems to have a definite *odor.*"

"I know what you mean. Remember, I used to keep some of these exhibits up in my office — the ones I'd worked on, I mean. But I got the feeling they gave me the willies." He held the door open for her. "Now I suppose you want to see the suspects? They're pretty big shots, both of 'em, and have to be handled with kid gloves. We're holding Charley Thayer, the wonder boy of politics, and Dexter Moore, the famous war correspondent."

"My, my," murmured Miss Withers. "Death loves a shining marksman, doesn't he? But Oscar, while we're here, I believe I would like a word with the attendant."

"That you'll have," said the Inspector, and led her into a little cubby of an office beneath the stair, where they faced a paunchy old man in police uniform but without the badge. He had a day's beard and a handsome, ruined face with eyes, the schoolteacher thought, like cold boiled onions. "This is Captain Halverstadt, retired," Piper introduced them. "Hal's in charge of the lower floors of the Criminal Courts Building here. Tell us about it again, oldtimer."

The voice was cracked and whining. "Well — you see, we got orders not to let just anybody into the Museum, on account we don't want any of the weapons filched and maybe used again. So we sorta give conducted tours, usually at ten in the morning and two in the afternoon. Comes two o'clock today and only Mr. Holcomb, that's the victim, showed up. But at the last minute the two others arrive —"

"Together?" demanded Miss Withers.

"No, ma'am. One of them as we was coming down the stairs, and the other just as I unlocked the Museum door. Mr. Thayer, it was, who came last. I got them inside and was just going

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into the little spiel I always give when I heard the phone ringing here in the office. So I had to excuse myself for just a minute. But to make sure that nobody got away with anything, I locked the door behind me when I went out."

"How long were you gone?" Piper asked.

"Maybe ten, fifteen minutes."

"And when you unlocked the door you didn't notice anything that would help us to figure out which man was telling the truth and which was lying?"

"No, Inspector. Both of them looked scared and excited. But neither man was rumpled up any. They were both talking all at once, so I couldn't make much sense of it. But I saw the corpse, so I held 'em both while the boys got here from across the street."

"I see," said Miss Withers in a far-away voice. "'I see, said the blind-man. . . .' By the way, Captain, do visitors to the Museum have to give a reason for wanting to see the place?"

Captain Halverstadt hesitated. "Well, I got orders to make sure they're not *wrongos*, looking for a gun to snatch. Now this Mr. Holcomb, he had a good reason. He said he used to be martyr de hotel at the Grande, and he wanted a look at the broken bottle that figured in a murder when he was working there. Mr. Thayer said he was interested in studying crime prevention because he was running for office on a reform ticket, and Mr. Moore said he was hipped on old guns and heard we had an 1854 derringer here. With people like that we don't ask much. . . ."

"Not even enough," Miss Withers observed softly. "Tell us, Captain. Do you have any ideas? What is your theory about the case?"

The old man blinked. "It's not really a theory, mind. It's just that the place gets you, when you have to be in there alone so much like I do. You get to thinking and — and hearing things. All those bloody knives and old guns and so forth, they were made for killing and they were used for killing, and sometimes you sort of hear them whispering in the back of your mind. They sort of say 'Go on, use me again, I want to do it again. . . .'" He shook his head. "Excuse me, I was just day-dreaming out loud."

He watched them through his rheumy eyes, still shaking his head, until they were up the stairs. "Batty as a bed-bug," the Inspector decided.

"There are more things in heaven and earth . . ." put in the schoolteacher. "Well, now for the suspects. That is, if they're not being beaten into unconsciousness with a rubber hose in the back room somewhere."

The Inspector grinned. "I only wish we could settle it that easy, but the old days are gone. Besides, these suspects aren't people you can work over with a rubber hose. Come on, we'll take the short cut."

He led the way up another flight of stairs, and then across the covered bridge to Headquarters. Then instead of turning down the hall to his own office he took her past a grilled, guarded door and finally down a hall to another door bearing the legend:

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Detective Bureau, Preliminary Investigation — Private. At that moment the door opened suddenly and there emerged a small untidy lawyer with a big cigar tilted skywards. "Oh, oh," said the Inspector. In tow of the little man was a handsome figure with a tanned face and wavy gray hair.

"Evening, Inspector," said the lawyer. "As you see, I got a writ. Book 'em or let 'em go, I always say." He touched his client's elbow. "Come on, Mr. Thayer."

But the man held back, drew himself up to his full height, and faced the Inspector. "Just a moment. I wish to make two things clear. As candidate for the Assembly I have the right to ask that you take special care in any releases you may make to the press. And I ask you to make clear the fact that I have not been under arrest, that I have made a detailed voluntary statement, that I will hold myself in readiness to cooperate with the police at any time of the day or night, and that I can prove that I have never met the victim of this infamous murder in all my life." He paused.

"Come on, Mr. Thayer," urged the lawyer, a little uneasily.

"Good evening, Inspector," said Charles Robin Thayer, and departed.

Miss Withers stared after him. "He might have said good evening to me, too. Women have the vote in New York State. At any rate, Oscar, he doesn't look like a murderer. So few of them do, though."

The Inspector led the way into the office, where a desk sergeant quickly stood up, shaking his head at the implied question in his superior's eye. "Nothing new in his statement, sir. Claims he didn't touch a single object in the room — was just looking, getting material for a talk on crime prevention, and all of a sudden he turned his head and saw Mr. Moore laying Mr. Holcomb's body down at the other end of the room."

"I know, I know. Look here, Hildegarde." The Inspector led the way across the office and slid back a wooden panel in the wall. Behind it was a sheet of cloudy glass, through which they could see a small room bright with one glaring lamp that shone into the eyes of a tanned, dapper man who sat on the edge of a hard chair, surrounded by three detectives. He looked far less worried than his inquisitors. "This thing," continued the Inspector, "is a mirror on the other side. They can't see or hear us."

"I gather," asked Miss Withers, "that this is Dexter Moore, the sole remaining suspect?"

He nodded. "Was overseas for Midwest Press for four years in the European theater. An expert on guns, to hear him tell it. He likes to collect them from dead Germans, Bulgarians, Rumanians and anybody."

"Nice and ghoulish, isn't he?" Miss Withers squinted closer. "Not as handsome as the other suspect, but rugged and useful looking. He seems quite pleased with himself."

They watched the pantomime, as the detectives, obviously referring to a typed statement, hurled barrage

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after barrage of questions at the man in the chair. Now and again he shook his head, with amused patience.

"Moore will have to be turned loose in a minute," Piper decided. "His statement is exactly the same as Thayer's — but in reverse! Besides, we can't hold a man on suspicion when he's got three medals and is a front-page hero. But blast it, somebody committed that murder! Holcomb didn't murder himself!" The panel closed. "And if I don't get busy, I'm going to be hunting a job."

Silently the schoolteacher followed the Inspector back to his own office, where he sank unhappily into the chair behind his desk and picked up carbon copies of the twin statements signed *Dexter N. Moore* and *Charles Robin Thayer*. He read them through, then tossed them aside. "Moore's has more adjectives, but Thayer winds up with a better climax. They both add up to the same thing."

The schoolteacher glanced at them, and nodded. "They read like truth. Which is natural, because whichever was the guilty one, he was smart enough to pull a complete switch of viewpoint."

"Yeah. If I had a motive, just a tiny little motive."

Miss Withers, who had been staring at a nearby brick wall through the open window, now turned quickly. "Oscar, an innocent man might lie — I mean a man innocent of murder. He might hate somebody so much that he would try to incriminate him. . . ."

"Look, Hildegarde. They don't even know each other. We've proved that, as clearly as anyone can. They never met. Thayer was secretary of an educational association upstate when Moore went overseas. Moore's only been back four days. I don't see —"

"Oscar, do you remember the impression the Black Museum made on us both? Isn't it within the realm of possibility that a mind might snap from the sheer weight of the exhibits, from the poisonous and deadly aura they give off?"

The Inspector was amused. "Look, Hildegarde. You saw Thayer and Moore. They're not the type to change into murderous maniacs instanter, just from being in a museum like that. They're hard-headed, ambitious citizens. Try again."

"Perhaps I will. By the way, Oscar, has it occurred to you that the murder would never have happened but for the accident of that telephone call. If there ever was a telephone call. . . ."

Just at that moment the telephone rang, with a loud angry clang. "Yes?" said the Inspector. "Oh, yes, Commissioner. Yes, I know —"

Miss Withers waved good-bye at her unhappy sparring-partner, and then went quietly out of the room.

Later that night, back in her own little apartment on West 73rd Street, the schoolteacher bent over her aquarium of fancy tropical fish and soberly addressed a fantastic and ornate *scalare*, who stared back at her and worked its shark-mouth foolishly. "The main problem," she was

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saying, "is the motive. Why should anybody want to kill a harmless little retired hotel employee?"

A black mollie, fat and sleek, swam past the angel-fish, who took out furiously after it, snapping at fin and tail. "Or," continued Miss Withers to her oblivious audience, "did somebody just have an overwhelming urge to kill, and take the nearest victim?" The schoolteacher sighed and snapped out the overhead light, reducing fairyland into a muddy puddle of water, sand and weeds, peopled by nondescript gray minnows.

The lightless pool, she fancied, was like her own mind at the moment — a dark and clouded place. Well, she might as well sleep on it. "To sleep, perchance to dream, I hope," said she, and went off to bed.

Dream she did that night. As a matter of fact, the Inspector was of the opinion that she was still dreaming when she stalked into his office shortly after nine o'clock next morning, announcing that a substitute was taking over her little charges at Jefferson School, and that she intended to devote her time to saving his precious skin.

"Don't you worry," she told him. "My subconscious worked it all out for me in my sleep. I dreamed —"

"My old father, good man that he was, always said he would rather hear rain on a tin roof than hear a woman tell her dreams," interrupted the Inspector. "And for your information, if you're still worrying about that telephone call, it was on the level all right. Those calls all pass through the Headquarters switchboard, and Cap Halverstadt had a call just after two yesterday. It was from Western Union, a long complicated telegram about a three horse parlay at Rockingham, signed Sam."

"Oh," said the schoolteacher. "Well, about the dream. I dreamed I was playing cards with the two suspects and there came time for a showdown. But one of them refused to put down his cards — and that one was the murderer! Only I don't remember which of them it was."

"Marvelous, Hildegarde!"

"Well, the meaning is clear. Oscar, an innocent and a guilty man must react differently to the same stimuli. That's the principle of the lie detector."

"Sure, sure. And I get booted out of the Force if I don't wash up this case before the Commissioner has his second cocktail tonight. And all because of the killing of a useless little old guy who was good for nothing but the writing of some reminiscences of the Good Old Days, that nobody would want to read about. . . ."

"Oh, Oscar!" cried Miss Withers. "Sometimes you are brilliant!"

A pleased but vague smile crossed the Inspector's face, but it died away as he heard the door close behind his visitor. Nor did he hear any more from her until a short time after noon that day, when she called on the phone and requested that he show up at her apartment as soon as convenient. Curiosity, and the lack of any other hopeful portent, brought him there

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within fifteen minutes. He found the maiden schoolteacher leisurely removing signs of unwonted make-up from her face. She had combed her gray-brown hair back into a violent up-sweep hair-do, and otherwise attired herself fearfully and quite wonderfully.

"For God's sake, Hildegarde, you look like Carrie Nation!"

"Well put, Oscar. Permit me to introduce myself. I am none other than Miss Miriam Whitehead Jones, world-famous impressionist poet. In impressionist circles only, of course. Having laid aside my fading laurels I have decided to set down on paper the memories of a busy life, filled with reminiscences of the great and the near-great who have been my friends and my — er, my intimates. I have been seeking a publisher for my memoirs. And since they will naturally be a bit on the racy side, I had to find one who was not too squeamish about the danger of libel suits."

"I still don't get it."

"You will. I happened at last to be successful, Oscar, although I was forced to spend the entire morning tramping up and down Madison Avenue. But I finally located a Mr. Hoppman, of Klaus Hoppman and Sons, who seems just the perfect publisher. You would not care for him, Oscar. He is a dusty little man, with a scrawny neck and a head as bare and reptilian as a turtle's. But he seems to specialize in the publication of memoirs such as mine will be, especially when the author contributes most of the expense. Indeed, I have learned that he has already set in type the first volume of 'Forty Years of Scandals at the Grande Hotel,' by Hubert Holcomb."

The Inspector took a deep breath, and nodded. "You figure you got a motive — that somebody might not want to be included in Holcomb's memoirs. And that somebody —"

"Oscar, if we were at 221B Baker Street I should ask you to take down the commonplace books and the indexes, but lacking Sherlock Holmes's library, do you know any local newspaperman who could sneak me into the paper's morgue?"

Piper hesitated. "Well, I know Weatherby over at the Brooklyn Falcon. He's been there since the year One. But what you expect to find —"

"I haven't the slightest idea. But I'll find it all the same."

A short time later she found herself seated at a battered oak table in a small room crowded with musty, tattered volumes. Miss Hildegarde Withers sneezed, sneezed again, and began to shuffle through interminable envelopes filled with dry and brittle press clippings. But her progress was very slow, and the hands of her watch moved swiftly.

The Inspector, a very worried man indeed, met her by appointment at her own apartment shortly before five. "Not that your wild ideas will do any good. The Commissioner means it this time, too. I had my boys pick up Cap Halverstadt, just in case he might have gone nuts from being in that place too long, but they couldn't get anything on him. We've been watch-

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ing Moore and Thayer, too, but they're acting like completely innocent bystanders."

"Did your men report that both Mr. Thayer and Mr. Moore received special delivery messages this afternoon? Because they did, and the messages were from me. Asking them to drop in here. I think they'll come, too. Because I hinted to each of them that he would meet an eye-witness to the murder. Meaning the other, of course. You see, Oscar, in the newspaper files I found what I had hoped to find. *Voilà*, the motive."

The Inspector eagerly seized the yellow clipping which she produced from her capacious bag. "German-Americans Affirm Faith in Future Amity," he read. "At a gala dinner in the Hotel Grande last evening, prominent New Yorkers representing the German-American Bund, the Brooklyn Turn-Verein, and other organizations interested in German-American cordiality, met to toast the New Germany. . . ."

"You can skip down to the last paragraph," Miss Withers said. "See here? 'Among the speakers were Hans Von Drebber, of the German Embassy in Washington, Ludwig Kraus, the famous author, and Carl Thayer, well-known Albany educator."

"I begin to see," said the Inspector.

"Just suppose," Miss Withers continued triumphantly, "that in his memoirs Hubert Holcomb happened to remember that early Nazi dinner at his hotel, and mentioned prominent guests? Suppose that Mr. Hoppman, the publisher, realizing that disclosure of such leanings on the part of Thayer would at this time wreck his political career, attempted a quiet bit of blackmail before publication?"

Piper nodded. "But Hildegarde, now that you've got a motive for Thayer, why not call off the invitation to Moore?"

"It's only fair that since the man has been under suspicion, he is here to see himself cleared. Besides, there are a few points that aren't worked out quite right as yet. I'm counting on you for that. Remember, I'm only an amateur, a self-appointed gad-fly to the police department, as you so often remind me. You'll have to take over at the proper time. By the way, did you bring what I asked for?" The Inspector felt in his pocket, and then produced the silken noose which was to be, he hoped, Exhibit A in the case of the State of New York versus the murderer of Hubert Holcomb. The schoolteacher took it gingerly and placed it on the table, directly under the rays of the lamp.

Then came a hammering of the door-knocker. A moment later Dexter Moore was facing them. He wore a debonair, quizzical smile, a little too much on the Richard Harding Davis type, Miss Withers thought. She preferred her foreign correspondents to be like Ernie Pyle.

"I thought this was to be a private interview," he said stiffly.

"Don't mind me, Mr. Moore," the Inspector told him easily. "I'm just the innocent bystander. But we want

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to finish this thing up, don't we?"

Moore took a few steps into the room, and then his eye fell upon the silken noose. "Are you infantile enough to suppose that you can disturb nerves as cool as mine by showing me the weapon in the case? After what I went through in the Black Museum yesterday —"

He was interrupted by a second hammering of the knocker. This time it was Mr. Thayer, who had changed into a dinner jacket. He surveyed them all with the perfect aplomb, the trained gestures, of the professional man of politics. "I don't understand your note, Miss Withers. And I don't think I like remaining here in the company of a man whom I know to be a murderer. . . ."

"Sit down, Thayer, and let the lady say her say," cut in Dexter Moore, smiling a brave, grim smile. "You know very well which of us is the murderer. Let's get on with it."

Miss Withers sniffed. "I intend to. You see, gentlemen, it is important that before we leave this room we establish for all time, to the satisfaction of the police and the public, just which one of you is guilty and which is innocent."

"Is this going to be a long lecture?" Thayer looked at his watch.

"Just long enough, I hope. Mr. Holcomb, for whose murder you are both under suspicion, was killed because in writing the reminiscences of a busy life as *maître d'hôtel* at a notorious gathering place of the city that was New York, he touched upon an old scandal in the past of one of you gentlemen. His publishers, either for their own protection or for purposes of polite blackmail, brought the matter to the attention of the murderer. No doubt they contacted dozens of people who were mentioned in the manuscript. But one person had too much to lose. He followed Holcomb, learned he was waiting to see the interior of the Black Museum, and slipped away to send a complicated telegram to the attendant, which would take at least ten or fifteen minutes to deliver by phone. It is possible to specify the exact time of delivery for a telegram, you see. That would, he expected, leave him alone with his unsuspecting victim. As fate would have it, he wasn't alone. But he went ahead with it, figuring that at worst it would only be one man's word against another's. But you see, it is not impossible to delve back into a man's forgotten past and to discover just what secret it was that would make him murder. . . ."

The Inspector, on his toes, was watching Thayer. That was why he very nearly swallowed his cigar when he saw Dexter Moore spring to his feet. "So what!" the man cried. "Suppose you did find out about what happened that night in the suite at the Grande! Suppose I did go out of the window in my underwear — I didn't know it was a water pistol the fellow threatened us with! Anyway, the hotel hushed up the whole thing, and I was just another newspaperman then. But if it came out *now* —"

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He stopped, swallowed. "But I wouldn't kill to keep that secret. Besides, who knows but Mr. Thayer here has a similar old scandal in *his* past."

"As a matter of fact," the Inspector put in, "we know about Mr. Thayer's secret. It was a certain dinner, with some speakers since grown famous. Or infamous."

"Okay!" cut in Thayer. "And you're right back where you started. Either of us has a motive, of a sort. But I say that Dexter Moore killed Holcomb. He says that I killed him. It's up to the police department to prove which of us it was."

Miss Hildegarde Withers looked across the room toward the tank of tropical fish. The reflecting light was shining now, and the place was a fairyland again, a lambent tropical forest filled with glittering, phosphorescent beings, Angel-fish, neons, golden tetras, mollies, and jewelled butterfly bettas moved magically and surely through the turquoise water. . . .

And then she knew.

She turned suddenly to face the two men. "Two negatives make a positive," said Hildegarde Withers. "Each of you blames the other. Captain Halverstadt says that neither of you showed signs of a struggle, that your clothes were not disheveled. The police have proved that neither of you knew Hubert Holcomb, and that you had never met one another — except perhaps between the pages of his manuscript. But it is plain as the nose on my face, gentlemen. Each of you came there to kill him. You read the intent in each other's eyes, and then and there was born the unholy inspiration to kill him *together!*"

Dexter Moore laughed harshly. "There is no proof in all that, no case the Inspector can ever hand over to a district attorney. It is still Thayer's word against mine, mine against his, yours against ours."

"I have another witness," promised Miss Hildegarde Withers. She held up the silken rope. "This is almost nine feet long, gentlemen. In the old days, when such things as these were used by the assassins, they made a noose and gave one swift jerk, snapping the victim's neck. According to my encyclopedia, the Hashhashim — or hashish-eaters — used to kill Christians with this, by the dozens. But according to the assistant medical examiner Holcomb was strangled to death *slowly!* That takes time."

"There could have been time enough," Thayer put in. "I was very interested in some exhibits at the other end of the room."

"There was time enough," Miss Withers raced desperately on, "for either of you separately to creep up on Holcomb and to strangle him. But that would have given Holcomb a chance to fight back, however feebly. He would have clawed at your face, your clothing. Were there any signs — any signs at all — of such a struggle? No! But if you were to hold — *each* of you — an end of this rope, if you were to loop it once around his neck and both stand well out of reach, *if you were to play tug-of-war* until he collapsed,

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wouldn't that do the job neatly? Don't answer. I can read it in your faces. You knew that the individual cases against you would cancel out — and you took a chance —"

"They still cancel out," Thayer said wearily. "Look at the Inspector. He knows the case would be laughed out of court."

Slowly the Inspector nodded. Miss Withers sneaked a glance at her watch, and a look of quiet triumph came over her face. "There's one thing that won't be laughed out of court," she said. "One little detail that you murderers didn't know and couldn't know. Exhibits in the Black Museum are stained with an invisible powder, known to chemists as oxy-methane blue. The idea was to prevent pilfering, since oxy-methane blue after some hours forms an indelible stain upon the human skin. And both of you claimed you didn't touch anything in the Black Museum — not even the murder rope!"

The two men looked incredulously at their right hands, and both kept staring, for a deep blue stain marked their palms. Then followed what Miss Withers would rather not have witnessed, for both broke down into sobbing, frenzied confessions, screaming, ranting, struggling against the detectives who poured in from the hall. But finally they were taken away.

The inspector made his triumphant phone call to the Commissioner and than sank down wearily beside his old friend. "You sure had me going for a minute," he confessed. "Hildegarde, what's this about oxy-something blue powder on the exhibits in the Black Museum? I never heard of it."

She smiled. "It wasn't in the Museum. We used it at the school last fall, to catch a child who was pilfering in the cloak room. It doesn't work in a few hours, it works in a few minutes. Look at your own palm, Oscar."

He looked, and gasped. "But Hildegarde —"

"It was smeared on my doorknocker," confessed the schoolteacher.

RANDOM REMARKS ON RATIOCINATION

Now that you have finished reading "The Riddle of the Black Museum," we can reveal an interesting anecdote about detective-story plot, its conception and consummation.

One week after we had received, read, and purchased Stuart Palmer's "The Black Museum," another manuscript by an entirely different but equally famous detective-story writer reached your Editor's desk. Manuscript Number Two produced in your Editor a literary frisson d'horreur, *a peculiarly odd and prickling moment previously unmatched in our editorial experience. For consider: the basic*

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plot device of the second manuscript was identical with that in "The Black Museum"!

In the Palmer story three men are locked in a room. When the door is opened, one of the three men is found murdered and each of the two survivors points to the other and screams: "He did it! I saw him!"

In Manuscript Number Two, three men take a self-service elevator from one floor to another. When the elevator door is opened, one of the three men is found murdered and each of the two survivors accuses the other of committing the crime. Each tells exactly the same story — about the other suspect.

Having already accepted and paid for the Stuart Palmer story, we could not with a free editorial conscience buy and publish the second manuscript. But now, in retrospect, we wonder if most readers will agree with that decision. Might it not have been a stimulating and rewarding experience to see how two famous writers would have treated the same basic plot device? — how each, stemming from the same crime situation, would have developed wholly different characters, clues, and conclusions?

This is not a new literary idea — it has been done before. In MARK TWAIN'S LETTERS *(1917), edited by Albert Bigelow Paine, you will find the following footnote on page 275: "The 'skeleton novelette' mentioned in the next letter refers to a plan concocted by [William Dean] Howells and Clemens, by which each of twelve authors was to write a story, using the same plot 'blindfolded' as to what the others had written. It was a regular 'Mark Twain' notion. . . ." The great Mark actually fulfilled his part of the round-robin. The Twain story — about 5000 words long — is called "A Murder, A Mystery, and a Marriage." It has never been printed in any of Mark Twain's authorized books; the only appearance of the story is a private printing in 1945 by Manuscript House (House of El Dieff), 45 East 51st Street, New York City, edition limited to 16 copies of which 2 were deposited with the Library of Congress for copyright, leaving a mere 14 copies available to the public. Your Editor's collection of books of detective-crime short stories — the largest and finest in the world — contains one of the 14 copies of this completely unknown detective story by Mark Twain, and even now we are trying to arrange for publication of the story in EQMM. By the way, House of El Dieff is the firm name used by Lew D. Feldman, who is the only bookseller in the world specializing in first editions of the detective story, both in manuscript and book form, from Poe to Poirot, from Uncle Abner to Prince Zaleski.*

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ANGLO-AMERICAN DIFFERENCES OF OPINION

Most good books are published more or less simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic and the overwhelming majority of these duo-issues bear the same title both in the American and English editions. Only infrequently do transatlantic editors disagree on the aptness or selling appeal of an author's original title. For example, every Ellery Queen novel and book of short stories has appeared in England under the identical title used by the American publisher. But there are exceptions to the rule, and sometimes the American publisher wins the laurels, sometimes the English publisher takes the honors, and sometimes it's six of one and half-dozen of another.

Take the case of Thomas Burke's volume containing "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole," one of the twelve best detective short stories ever written: in England the book was called THE PLEASANTRIES OF OLD QUONG; *in America it appeared as* A TEA-SHOP IN LIMEHOUSE. *For flavor and subtle irony we prefer the English title; nevertheless we can understand the motive behind the American publisher's choice. The name of Thomas Burke is inextricably tied to the word Limehouse —* LIMEHOUSE NIGHTS, *remember? When Burke's sequel to* LIMEHOUSE NIGHTS *was issued in London, it was called* WHISPERING WINDOWS; *the American publisher, seeking to capitalize on the enormous popularity achieved by* LIMEHOUSE NIGHTS, *smartly titled the sequel* MORE LIMEHOUSE NIGHTS. *For the same connotative reason the American publisher changed* THE PLEASANTRIES OF OLD QUONG *to* A TEA-SHOP IN LIMEHOUSE.

Leslie Charteris's BOODLE *became in America* THE SAINT INTERVENES *— a toss-up on titular taste. Agatha Christie's first book of shorts about Miss Marple was unimaginatively called* THE THIRTEEN PROBLEMS *in England; the American publisher changed the title to* THE TUESDAY CLUB MURDERS *— a victory hands down for American appellation. E. Phillips Oppenheim's* THE GAME OF LIBERTY *was transformed in the United States to* AN AMIABLE CHARLATAN, *and Arthur B. Reeve's* THE SILENT BULLET *was anglicized to* THE BLACK HAND.

Even rarer than changes in titles are those instances in which American and English publishers agree on the title but disagree on the contents. Perhaps the most extreme example of this type of editorial difference of opinion is the mysterious case of Edgar Wallace's book titled THE BLACK. *In England it is a collection of short stories about a detective named Dixon; in the United States it is a full-length novel completely unrelated in plot and characters to the original English publication.*

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Two more illustrations of same-title-but-divergent-contents emerge from the pool of memory. One is Agatha Christie's first book of Poirot shorts, called POIROT INVESTIGATES; *the English edition contains eleven stories, the American edition fourteen! Conversely, the English edition of Gilbert K. Chesterton's* THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH *contains three stories not included in the American issue.*

All this may sound like dryasdust bibliographic data — criminous chitchat, gory gossip. But it isn't. There's deep significance behind these seemingly dull facts. For consider: if three stories were left out of the American edition of THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH, *then there are three Chesterton stories most of you have missed! Copies of the English edition of* THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH *are, believe us, hard to come by these lean rare-book days. Therefore these three Chesterton stories are not only virtually unknown to American fans but worse, virtually impossible to find! Which brings us, as it has so often in the past, to EQMM's Department of Discoveries. Again we wave a wizard's wand; again we pass a murderous miracle — and bring you an "unknown" detective story by an old master. For the tale that follows is one of those three Chesterton stories never published in book form in the United States. . . .*

"The Garden of Smoke" is a detective story. The detective is not one of Chesterton's familiar sleuths — not Father Brown, nor Horne Fisher, nor Gabriel Gale, nor Mr. Pond. His name is Traill and we are told he's an official at Scotland Yard. But in this tale he is more the snoop than the sleuth, more the interrupter than the investigator. Indeed, his interruption is typically Chestertonian: it is "as soft as the note of the bird, but as unexpected as a thunderbolt." Traill is merely the curious, prying, next-door neighbor and unlike Chesterton's other great detectives, he wears a top hat.

There is a morbid fancy in this story, full of prodigious paradox, full of symbolic sound and fabulous fury, signifying again the great G.K.C.'s legerdemain in the latitudes of lethal literature.

THE GARDEN OF SMOKE

by GILBERT K. CHESTERTON

THE end of London looked very like the end of the world: and the last lamppost of the suburbs like a lonely star in space. It also resembled the end of the world in another respect: that it was a long time coming.

The girl, Catharine Crawford, was a good walker; she had the fine figure of the mountaineer; there almost went with her a wind from the hills through all the gray labyrinth of London. For she came from the high villages of

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Westmoreland, and seemed to carry the quiet colors of them in her light-brown hair, her open features, irregular, yet the reverse of plain, the framework of two grave and very beautiful gray eyes. But the mountaineer began to feel the labyrinth of London suburbs interminable and intolerable, swiftly as she walked. She knew little of the details of her destination, save the address of the house, and the fact that she was going there as a companion to a Mrs. Mowbray, or rather to *the* Mrs. Mowbray; a famous lady novelist and fashionable poet, married, it was said, to some matter-of-fact medical man reduced to the permanent status of Mrs. Mowbray's husband. And when she found the house eventually, it was at the end of the very last line of houses, where the suburban gardens faded into the open fields.

The whole heavens were full of the hues of evening, though still as luminous as noon, as if in a land of endless sunset. It settled down in a shower of gold amid the twinkling leaves of the thin trees of the gardens, most of which had low fences and hedges, and lay almost as open to the yellow sky as the fields beyond. The air was so still that occasional voices, talking or laughing on distant lawns, could be heard like clear bells. One voice, more recurrent than the rest, seemed to be whistling and singing the old sailors' song of "Spanish Ladies;" it drew nearer and nearer, and when she turned into the last garden gate at the corner the singer was the first figure she encountered. He stood in a garden red with very gorgeous ranks of standard roses, and against a background of the golden sky and a white cottage, with touches of rather fanciful color; the sort of cottage that is not built for cottagers.

He was a lean, not ungraceful man in gray, with a limp straw hat pulled forward above his dark face and black beard, out of which projected an almost blacker cigar; which he removed when he saw the lady.

"Good evening," he said politely, "I think you must be Miss Crawford. Mrs. Mowbray asked me to tell you that she would be out here in a minute or two, if you cared to look around the garden first. I hope you don't mind my smoking. I do it to kill the insects, you know, on the roses. Need I say that this is the one and only origin of all smoking? Too little credit, perhaps, is given to the self-sacrifice of my sex, from the club-men in smoking-rooms to the navvies on scaffoldings, all steadily and firmly smoking, on the mere chance that a rose may be growing somewhere in the neighborhood. Handicapped, like most of my comrades, with a strong natural dislike of tobacco, I yet contrive to conquer it and ——"

He broke off, because the gray eyes regarding him were a little blank and even bleak. He spoke with gravity and even gloom; and she was conscious of humor, but was not sure that it was good humor. Indeed she felt, at first sight, something faintly sinister about him; his face was aquiline and

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his figure feline, almost as in the fabulous griffin; a creature molded of the eagle and the lion, or perhaps the leopard. She was not sure that she approved of fabulous animals.

"Are you Dr. Mowbray?" she asked, rather stiffly.

"No such luck," he replied, "I haven't got such beautiful roses, or such a beautiful — household, shall we say. But Mowbray is about the garden somewhere, spraying the roses with some low scientific instrument called a syringe. He's a great gardener; but you won't find him spraying with the same perpetual, uncomplaining patience as you'll find me smoking."

With these words he turned on his heel and hallooed his friend's name across the garden in a style which, along with the echo of his song, somehow suggested a ship's captain; which was indeed his trade. A stooping figure disengaged itself from a distant rose-bush and came forward apologetically.

Dr. Mowbray also had a loose straw hat and a beard, but there the resemblance ended; his beard was fair and he was burly and big of shoulder; his face was good-humored and would have been good-looking, but that his blue and smiling eyes were a little wide apart; which rather increased the pleasant candor of his expression. By comparison the more deep-sunken eyes on either side of the dark captain's beak seemed to be too close together.

"I was explaining to Miss Crawford," said the latter gentleman, "the superiority of my way of curing your roses — of any of their little maladies. In scientific circles the cigar has wholly superseded the syringe."

"Your cigars look as if they'd kill the roses," replied the doctor. "Why are you always smoking your very strongest cigars here?"

"On the contrary, I am smoking my mildest," answered the captain, grimly. "I've got another sort here, if anybody wants them."

He turned back the lapel of his square jacket, and showed some dangerous-looking sticks of twisted leaf in his upper waistcoat pocket. As he did so they noticed also that he had a broad leather belt round his waist, to which was buckled a big crooked knife in a leather sheath.

As he spoke the French windows of the house opened abruptly, and a man in black came out and passed them, going out at the garden gate. He was walking rapidly, as if irritably, and putting on his hat and gloves as he went. Before he put on his hat he showed a head half bald and bumpy, with a semicircle of red hair; and before he put on his gloves he tore a small piece of paper into yet smaller pieces, and tossed it away among the roses by the road.

"Oh, one of Marion's friends from the Theosophical or Ethical Society, I think," said the doctor. "His name's Miall, a tradesman in the town, a chemist or something."

"He doesn't seem in the best or most ethical of tempers," observed the captain. "I thought you nature-worshippers were always serene. Well,

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he's released our hostess at any rate; and here she comes."

Marion Mowbray really looked like an artist, which an artist is not supposed to do. This did not come from her clinging green draperies and halo of Pre-Raphaelite brown hair, which need only have made her look like an esthete. But in her face there was a true intensity; her keen eyes were full of distances, that is of desires, but of desires too large to be sensuous. If such a soul was wasted by a flame, it seemed one of purely spiritual ambition. A moment after she had given her hand to the guest, with very graceful apologies, she stretched it out toward the flowers with a gesture that was quite natural, yet so decisive as to be almost dramatic.

"I simply must have some more of those roses in the house," she said, "and I've lost my scissors. I know it sounds silly, but when the fit comes over me I feel I must tear them off with my hands. Don't you love roses, Miss Crawford? I simply can't do without them sometimes."

The captain's hand had gone to his hip, and the queer crooked knife was naked in the sun; a shining but ugly shape. In a few flashes he had hacked and lopped away a long spray or two of blossom, and handed them to her with a bow, like a bouquet on the stage.

"Oh, thank you," she said, rather faintly; and one could fancy, somehow, a tragic irony behind the masquerade. The next moment she recovered herself, and laughed a little. "It's absurd I know; but I do so hate ugly things, and living in the London suburbs, though only on the edge of them. Do you know, Miss Crawford, the next-door neighbor walks about his garden in a top hat. Positively in a top hat! I see it passing just above that laurel hedge about sunset; when he's come back from the city, I suppose. Think of the laurel, that we poor poets are supposed to worship," and she laughed more naturally, "and then think of my feelings, looking up and seeing it wreathed round a top hat."

And, indeed, before the party entered the house to prepare for the evening meal, Catharine had actually seen the offending headdress appear above the hedge, a shadow of respectability in the sunshine of that romantic plot of roses.

At dinner they were served by a man in black like a butler, and Catharine felt an unmeaning embarrassment in the mere fact. A man-servant seemed out of place in that artistic toy cottage, and there was nothing notable about the man addressed as Parker except that he seemed especially so — a tall man with a wooden face and dark flat hair like a Dutch doll's. He would have been proper enough if the doctor had lived in Harley Street, but he was too big for the suburbs.

Nor was he the only incongruous element, nor the principal one. The captain, whose name seemed to be Fonblanque, still puzzled her and did not altogether please her. Her north-

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ern Puritanism found something obscurely rowdy about his attitude. It would be hardly adequate to say he acted as if he were at home; it would be truer to say he acted as if he were abroad in a *café* or tavern in some foreign port. Mrs. Mowbray was a vegetarian; and though her husband lived the simple life in a rather simpler fashion, he was sufficiently sophisticated to drink water. But Captain Fonblanque had a great flagon of rum all to himself, and did not disguise his relish; and the meal ended in smoke of the most rich and reeking description. And throughout the captain continued to fence with his hostess and with the stranger, with the same flippancies that had fallen from him in the garden.

"It's my childlike innocence that makes me drink and smoke," he explained. "I can enjoy a cigar as I could a sugarstick; but you jaded dissipated vegetarians look down on such sugarsticks." His irony was partly provocative, whether of her hosts or herself; and Catharine was conscious of something slightly Mephistophelean about his blue-black beard and ivory-yellow face amid the fumes that hung round his head.

In passing out, the ladies paused accidentally at the open French windows, and Catharine looked out upon the darkening lawn. She was surprised to see that clouds had already come up out of the colored west, and the twilight was troubled with rain. There was a silence and then Catharine said, rather suddenly:

"That neighbor of yours must be very fond of his garden. Almost as fond of the roses as you are, Mrs. Mowbray."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked that lady, turning back.

"He's still standing among his flowers in the pouring rain," said Catharine, staring, "and will soon be standing in the pitch dark too. I can still see his black hat in the dusk."

"Who knows," said the lady poet, softly, "perhaps a sense of beauty has really stirred in him in a strange, sudden way. If seeds under black earth can grow into those glorious roses, what will souls even under black hats grow into at last? Don't you like the smell of the damp earth, and that deep noise of all the roses drinking?"

"All the roses are teetotalers, anyhow," remarked Catharine, smiling.

Her hostess smiled also. "I'm afraid Captain Fonblanque shocked you a little; he's rather eccentric, wearing that crooked Eastern dagger just because he's traveled in the East, and drinking rum of all ridiculous things, just to show he's a sailor. But he's an old friend, you know."

"Yes, he reminds me of a pirate in a play," said Catharine, laughing. "He might be stalking round this house looking for hidden treasure of gold and silver."

Mrs. Mowbray seemed to start a little, and then stared out into the dark in silence. At last she said, in a changed voice:

"It is strange that you should say that."

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"And why," inquired her companion in some wonder.

"Because there is a hidden treasure in this house," said Mrs. Mowbray, "and such a thief might well steal it. It's not exactly gold or silver, but it's almost as valuable, I believe, even in money. I don't know why I tell you this; but at least you can see I don't distrust you. Let's go into the other room." And she rather abruptly led the way in that direction.

Catharine Crawford was a woman whose conscious mind was full of practicality; but her unconscious mind had its own poetry; which was all on the note of purity. She loved white light and clear waters, boulders washed smooth in rivers, and the sweeping curves of wind. It was perhaps the poetry that Wordsworth, at his finest, found in the lakes of her own land, and in principle it could repose in the artistic austerity of Marion Mowbray's home. But whether the stage was filled too much by the almost fantastic figure of the piratical Fonblanque, or whether the summer heat, with its hint of storm, obscured such clarity, she felt an oppression. Even the rose-garden seemed more like a chamber curtained with red and green than an open place. Her own chamber was curtained in sufficiently cool and soothing colors, yet she fell asleep later than usual, and then heavily.

She woke with a start from some tangled dream of which she recalled no trace. With senses sharpened by darkness, she was vividly conscious of a strange smell. It was vaporous and heavy, not unpleasant to the nostrils, yet somehow all the more unpleasant to the nerves. It was not the smell of any tobacco she knew; and yet she connected it with those sinister black cigars to which the captain's brown finger had pointed. She thought half-consciously that he might be still smoking in the garden; and that those dark and dreadful weeds might well be smoked in the dark. But it was only half-consciously that she thought or moved at all; she remembered half rising from her bed; and then remembered nothing but more dreams, which left a little more recollection in their track. They were but a medley of the smoking and the strange smell and the scents of the rose-garden; but they seemed to make up a mystery as well as a medley. Sometimes the roses were themselves a sort of purple smoke. Sometimes they glowed from purple to fiery crimson, like the butts of a giant's cigars. And that garden of smoke was haunted by the pale yellow face and blue-black beard, and she awoke with the word "Bluebeard" on her mind and almost on her mouth.

Morning was so much of a relief as to be almost a surprise; the rooms were full of the white light that she loved, and which might well be the light of a primeval wonder. As she passed the half-open door of the doctor's scientific study or consulting room, she paused by a window, and saw the silver daybreak brightening over the garden. She was idly counting the birds that began to dart by the house; and as she counted the fourth she heard the

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shock of a falling chair, followed by a voice crying out and cursing again and again. The voice was strained and unnatural; but after the first few syllables she recognized it as that of the doctor. "It's gone!" he was saying, "The stuff's gone, I tell you!"

The reply was inaudible; but she already suspected that it came from the servant Parker, whose voice was as baffling as his face. The doctor answered again in unabated agitation:

"The drug, you devil or dunce or whatever you are! The drug I told you to keep an eye on!"

This time she heard the dull tones of the other who seemed to be saying, "There's very little of it gone, sir."

"Why has any of it gone?" cried Doctor Mowbray. "Where's my wife?"

Probably hearing the rustle of a skirt outside, he flung the door open and came face to face with Catharine, falling back before her in consternation. The room into which she now looked in bewilderment was neat and even severe; except for the fallen chair still lying on its back on the carpet. It was fitted with bookcases, and contained a rack of bottles and phials, like those in a chemist's shop, the colors of which looked like jewels in the brilliant early daylight. One glittering green bottle bore a large label of "Poison," but the present problem seemed to revolve round a glass vessel, rather like a decanter, which stood on the table, more than half full of a dust or powder of a rich reddish brown.

Against this strict scientific background the tall servant looked more important and appropriate; in fact she was soon conscious that he was something more intimate than a servant who waited at table. He had at least the air of a doctor's assistant; and indeed, in comparison with his distracted employer, might also at that moment have been the attendant in a private asylum.

"It's the cursed plague breaking out again," said the doctor hastily. "Go and see if my wife is in the dining-room."

He pulled himself together as Parker left the room, and picked up the chair that had fallen on the carpet, offering it to the girl with a gesture.

"Well, I suppose you ought to have been told. Anyhow you'll have to be told now."

There was another silence, and then he said: "My wife is a poet, you know; a creative artist and all that. And all enlightened people know that a genius can't be judged quite by common rules of conduct. A genius lives by a recurrent need for a sort of inspiration."

"What do you mean?" asked Catharine almost impatiently, for the preamble of excuses was a strain on her nerves.

"There's a kind of opium in that bottle," he said abruptly, "a very rare kind. She smokes it occasionally; that's all. I wish Parker would hurry up and find her."

"I can find her, I think," said Catharine, relieved by the chance of doing something; and not a little

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relieved, also, to get out of the scientific room. "I think I saw her going down the garden path."

When she went out into the rose-garden it was full of the freshness of the sunrise; and all her smoke nightmares were rolled away from it. The roof of her green and crimson room seemed to have been lifted off like a lid. She went down many winding paths without seeing any living thing but the birds hopping here and there; then she came to the corner of one turning, and stood still.

In the middle of the sunny path, a few yards from one of the birds, lay something crumpled like a great green rag. But it was really the rich green dress of Marion Mowbray; and beyond it was her fallen face, colorless against its halo of hair, and one arm thrust out in a piteous stiffness toward the roses, as she had stretched it when Catharine saw her for the first time. Catharine gave a little cry, and the birds flashed away into a tree. Then she bent over the fallen figure; and knew, in a blast of all the trumpets of terror, why the face was colorless, and why the arm was stiff.

An hour afterward, still in that world of rigid unreality that remains long after a shock, she was but automatically, though efficiently, helping in the hundred minute and aching utilities of a house of mourning. How she had told them she hardly knew; but there was no need to tell much. Mowbray the doctor soon had bad news for Mowbray the husband, when he had been but a few moments silent and busy over the body of his wife. Then he turned away; and Catharine almost feared he would fall.

A problem confronted him still, however, even as a doctor, when he had so grimly solved his problem as a husband. His medical assistant, whom he had always had reason to trust, still emphatically asserted that the amount of the drug missing was insufficient to kill a kitten. He came down and stood with the little group on the lawn where the dead woman had been laid on a sofa, to be examined in the best light. He repeated his assertion in the face of the examination; and his wooden face was knotted with obstinacy.

"If he is right," said Captain Fonblanque, "she must have got it from somewhere else as well, that's all. Did any strange people come here lately?"

He had taken a turn or two of pacing up and down the lawn, when he stopped with an arrested gesture.

"Didn't you say that Theosophist was also a chemist?" he asked. "He may be as theosophical or ethical as he likes; but he didn't come here on a theosophical errand. No, by gad, nor an ethical one."

It was agreed that this question should be followed up first; Parker was despatched to the High Street of the neighboring suburb; and about half an hour afterward the black-clad figure of Mr. Miall came back into the garden, much less swiftly than he had gone out of it. He removed his hat out of respect for the presence of death; and his face under the ring of

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red hair was whiter than the dead.

But though pale, he also was firm; and that upon a point that brought the inquiry once more to a standstill. He admitted that he had once supplied that peculiar brand of opium, and he did not attempt to dissipate the cloud of responsibility that rested on him so far. But he vehemently denied that he had supplied it yesterday, or even lately, or indeed for long past.

"She must have got some more somehow," cried the doctor, in dogmatic and even despotic tones, "and where could she have got it but from you?"

"And where could I have got it from anybody?" demanded the tradesman, equally hotly. "You seem to think it's sold like shag. I tell you there's no more of it in England — a chemist can't get it even for desperate cases. I gave her the last I had months ago, more shame to me; and when she wanted more yesterday, I told her I not only wouldn't but couldn't. There's the scraps of the note she sent me, still lying where I tore it up in a temper."

The doctor seemed to regard the hitch in the inquiry with a sort of harassed fury. He browbeat the pale chemist even more than he had browbeaten his servant about his first and smaller discovery. His desire at the moment, so concrete as to be comic in such a scene, seemed to be the desire to hang a chemist.

The figures in the little group on the lawn had fallen into such angry attitudes, that one could almost fancy they would strike each other even in the presence of the dead; when an interruption came, as soft as the note of the bird, but as unexpected as a thunderbolt. A voice from several yards away said mildly but more or less loudly:

"Permit me to offer my assistance."

They all looked around and saw the next-door neighbor's top hat, above a large, loose, heavy-lidded face, leaning over the low fringe of laurels.

"I'm sure I can be of some little help," he said. And the next moment he had calmly taken a high stride over the low hedge and was walking across the lawn toward them. He was a large, heavily walking man in a loose frock-coat; his clean-shaven face was at once heavy and cadaverous. He spoke in a soft and even sentimental tone, which contrasted with his impudence and, as it soon appeared, with his trade.

"What do you want here?" asked Dr. Mowbray sharply, when he had recovered from sheer astonishment.

"It is you who want something — sympathy," said the strange gentleman. "Sympathy and also light. I think I can offer both. Poor lady, I have watched her for many months."

"If you've been watching over the wall," said the Captain, frowning, "we should like to know why. There are suspicious facts here, and you seem to have behaved in a suspicious manner."

"Suspicion rather than sympathy," said the stranger, with a sigh, "is perhaps the defect in my duties. But my

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sorrow for this poor lady is perfectly sincere. Do you suspect me of being mixed up in her trouble?"

"Who are you?" asked the angry doctor.

"My name is Traill," said the man in the top hat. "I have some official title; but it was never used except at Scotland Yard. We needn't use it among neighbors."

"You are a detective, in fact?" observed the Captain. But he received no reply, for the new investigator was already examining the corpse, quite respectfully but with a professional absence of apology. After a few moments he rose again, and looked at them under the large drooping eyelids which were his most prominent features, and said simply:

"It is satisfactory to let people go, Dr. Mowbray; and your druggist and your assistant can certainly go. It was not the fault of either of them that the unhappy lady died."

"Do you mean it was a suicide?" asked the other.

"I mean it was a murder," said Mr. Traill. "But I have a very sufficient reason for saying she was not killed by the druggist."

"And why not?"

"Because she was not killed by the drug," said the man from next door.

"What?" exclaimed the Captain, with a slight start. "How else could she have been killed?"

"She was killed with a short and sharp instrument, the point of which was prepared in a particular manner for the purpose," said Traill in the level tones of a lecturer. "There was apparently a struggle but probably a short, or even a slight one. Poor lady, just look at this;" and he lifted one of the dead hands quite gently, and pointed to what appeared to be a prick or puncture on the wrist.

"A hypodermic needle, perhaps," said the Doctor in a low voice. "She generally took a drug by smoking it; but she might have used a hypodermic syringe and needle after all."

The detective shook his head, so that one could almost imagine his hanging eyelids flapping with the loose movement. "If she injected it herself," he said sadly, "she would make a clean perforation. This is more a scratch than a prick and you can see it has torn the lace on her sleeve a little."

"But how can it have killed her," Catharine was compelled to ask, "if it was only a scratching on the wrist?"

"Ah," said Mr. Traill; and then, after a short silence, "I think," he said, "that when we find the dagger, we shall find it a poisoned dagger. Is that plain enough, Captain Fonblanque?"

The next moment he seemed to droop again with his rather morbid and almost maudlin tone of compassion. "Poor lady," he repeated. "She was so fond of roses, wasn't she? Strew on her roses, roses, as the poet says. I really feel somehow that it might give a sort of rest to her, even now."

He looked around the garden with his heavy, half-closed eyes, and ad-

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dressed Fonblanque more sympathetically. "It was on a happier occasion, Captain, that you last cut flowers for her; but I can't help wishing it could be done again now."

Half unconsciously, the Captain's hand went to where the hilt of his knife had hung, then his hand dropped, as if in abrupt recollection. But as the flap of his jacket shifted for an instant, they saw that the leather sheath was empty and the knife was gone.

"Such a very sad story, such a terrible story," murmured the man in the top hat distantly, as if he were talking of a novel. "Of course it is a silly fancy about the flowers. It is not such things as that that are our duties to the dead."

The others seemed still a little bewildered; but Catharine was looking at the Captain as if she had been turned to stone by a basilisk. Indeed that moment had been for her the beginning of a monstrous interregnum of imagination, which might well be said to be full of monsters. Something of such mythology had hung about the garden since her first fancy about a man like a griffin. It lasted for many days and nights, during which the detective seemed to hover over the house like a vampire; but the vampire was not the most awful of the monsters. She hardly defined to herself what she thought, or rather refused to think. But she was conscious of other unknown emotions coming to the surface and co-existing, somehow, with that sunken thought that was their contrary.

For some time past the first unfriendly feelings about the Captain had rather faded from her mind; even in that short space he had improved on acquaintance, and his sensible conduct in the crisis was a relief from the wild grief and anger of the husband, however natural these might be. Moreover the very explosion of the opium secret, in accounting for the cloud upon the house, had cleared away another suspicion she had half entertained about the wife and the piratical guest. This she was now disposed to dismiss, so far at least as he was concerned; and she had lately had an additional reason for doing so. The eyes of Fonblanque had been following her about, in a manner in which so humorous and therefore modest a lady was not likely to be mistaken; and she was surprised to find in herself a corresponding recoil from the idea of this comedy of sentiment turning suddenly to a tragedy of suspicion.

For the next few nights she again slept uneasily; and, as is often the case with a crushed or suppressed thought, the doubt raged and ruled in her dreams. What might be called the Bluebeard *motif* ran through even wilder scenes of strange lands, full of fantastic cities and giant vegetation; through all of which passed a solitary figure with a blue beard and a red knife. It was as if this sailor not only had a wife, but a murdered wife, in every port. And there recurred again and again, like a distant but distinct voice speaking, the accents of the

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detective: "If only we could find the dagger, we should find it a poisoned dagger."

Yet nothing could have seemed more cool and casual than the moment, on the following morning, when she did find it. She had come down from the upper rooms and gone through the French windows into the garden once more; she was about to pass down the paths among the rose bushes, when she looked round and saw the Captain leaning on the garden gate. There was nothing unusual in his idle and somewhat languid attitude; but her eye was fixed, and as if it were frozen, on the one bright spot where the sun again shone and shifted on the crooked blade. He was somewhat sullenly hacking with it at the wooden fence; but stopped when their eyes met.

"So you've found it again?" was all that she could say.

"Yes, I've found it," he replied rather gloomily, and then after a pause; "I've also found several other things, including how I lost it."

"Do you mean," asked Catharine, unsteadily, "that you've found out about — about Mrs. Mowbray?"

"It wouldn't be correct to say I've found it out," he answered. "Our depressing neighbor with the top hat and the eyelids has found it out, and he's upstairs now, finding more of it out. But if you mean do I know how Marion was murdered, yes, I do; and I rather wish I didn't."

After a minute or two of objectless chipping on the fence, he stuck the point of his knife into the wood; and faced her abruptly.

"Look here," he said, "I should like to explain myself a little. When we first knew each other, I suppose I was very flippant. I admired your gravity and great goodness so much that I had to attack it; can you understand that? But I was not entirely flippant — no, nor entirely wrong. Think again of all the silly things that annoyed you, and of whether they have turned out so very silly? Are not rum and tobacco really more childlike and innocent than some things, my friend? Has any low sailors' tavern seen a worse tragedy than you have seen here? Mine are vulgar tastes, or if you like, vulgar vices. But there is one thing to be said for our appetites; that they are appetites. Pleasure may be only satisfaction; but it can be satisfied. We drink because we are thirsty; but not because we want to be thirsty. I tell you that these artists thirst for thirst. They want infinity, and they get it, poor souls. It may be bad to be drunk; but you can't be infinitely drunk; you fall down. A more horrible thing happens to them; they rise and rise, forever. Isn't it better to fall under the table and snore, than to rise through the seven heavens on the smoke of opium?"

She answered at last, with an appearance of thought and hesitation.

"There may be something in what you say; but it doesn't account for all the nonsensical things you said." She smiled a little and added, "You said you only smoked for the good of

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the roses, you know. You'll hardly pretend there was any solemn truth behind that."

He started, and then stepped forward leaving the knife standing and quivering in the fence.

"Yes, by Gad, there was!" he cried. "It may seem the maddest thing of of all, but it's true. Death and hell would not be in this house today, if they had only trusted my trick of smoking the roses."

Catharine continued to look at him wildly; but his own gaze did not falter or show a shade of doubt, and he went slowly back to the fence and plucked his knife out of it. There was a long silence in the garden before either of them spoke again.

"Do you think," he asked, in a low voice, "that Marion is really dead?"

"Dead!" repeated Catharine. "Of course she's dead."

He seemed to nod in brooding acquiescence staring at his knife; then he added: "Do you think her ghost walks?"

"What do you mean? Do you think so?" demanded his companion.

"No," he said, "but that drug of hers is still disappearing."

She could only repeat, with a pale face: "Still disappearing?"

"In fact, it's nearly disappeared," remarked the Captain. "You can come upstairs and see, if you like." He stopped and gazed at her a moment very seriously. "I know you are brave," he said. "Would you really like to see the end of this nightmare?"

"It would be a much worse nightmare if I didn't," she answered. The Captain, with a gesture at once negligent and resolved, tossed his knife among the rosebushes and turned toward the house.

She looked at him with a last flicker of suspicion. "Why are you leaving your dagger in the garden?" she asked abruptly.

"The garden is full of daggers," said the Captain as he went upstairs. Mounting the staircase with a catlike swiftness, he was some way ahead of the girl, in spite of her own mountaineering ease of movement. She had time to reflect that the grays and greens of the dados and decorative curtains had never seemed to her so dreary and even inhuman. And when she reached the landing and the door of the Doctor's study, she met the Captain again, face to face. For he stood now, with his face as pale as her own, and not any longer as leading her, but rather as barring her way.

"What is the matter?" she cried; and then, by a wild intuition, "Is somebody else dead?"

"Yes," replied Fonblanque, "somebody else is dead."

In the silence they heard within the heavy and yet soft movements of the strange investigator; Fonblanque spoke again with a new impulsiveness:

"Catharine, I think you know how I feel about you; but what I am trying to say now is not about myself. It may seem a queer thing for a man like me to say; but somehow I think you will understand. Before you go inside, remember the things outside. I don't

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mean my things, but yours. I mean the empty sky and all the good gray virtues and the things that are clean and strong like the wind. Believe me, they are real, after all; more real than the cloud on this accursed house."

"Yes, I think I understand you," she said. "And now let me pass." Apart from the detective's presence there were but two differences in the Doctor's study as compared with the time when she stood in it last; and though they bulked very unequally to the eye, they seemed almost equal in a deadly significance. On a sofa under the window, covered with a sheet, lay something that could only be a corpse; but the very bulk of it, and the way in which the folds of the sheet fell, showed her that it was not the corpse she had already seen. For herself she had hardly need to glance at it; she knew almost before she looked, that it was not the wife, but the husband. And on the table stood the glass vessel of the opium and the other green bottle labeled "Poison." But the opium vessel was quite empty.

The detective came forward with a mildness amounting to embarrassment.

"You are naturally prejudiced against me, my dear," he said. "You feel I am a morbid person; I think you sometimes feel I was probably a murderer. Well, I think you were right; not about the murder, but about the morbidity. I can't help being interested in tragedies that are my trade; and you're quite wrong if you think my sentiment's all hypocritical."

Catherine did not doubt his good nature. But the unanswered riddle still rode her imagination.

"But I thought you said," she protested, "that Mrs. Mowbray was not killed by the drug."

"She was not killed by the drug. She was killed *for* the drug. Did you notice anything odd about Dr. Mowbray, when you were last in his room?"

"He was naturally agitated," said the girl doubtfully.

"No, unnaturally agitated," replied Traill; "more agitated than a man so sturdy would have been even by the revelation of another's weakness. It was his own weakness that rattled him like a storm that morning. He was indeed angry that the drug was stolen by his wife; for the simple reason that he wanted all that was left for himself. I have rather an ear for distant conversation, Miss Crawford, and I once heard you talking at the window about a pirate and a treasure. Can't you picture two pirates stealing the same treasure bit by bit, till one of them killed the other in rage at seeing it vanish? That is what happened in this house; and perhaps we had better call it madness, and then pity it. The drug had become that unhappy man's life, and that a horribly happy life. He had long resolved that when he had really emptied this bottle," and Traill touched the receptacle of opium, "he would at once turn to this" — and he laid his lean hand on the green bottle of poison.

Catharine's face was still puzzled.

"You mean her husband killed her,

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and then killed himself?" she said, in her simple way. "But how did he kill her, if not with the drug? Indeed how did he kill her at all?"

"He stabbed her," replied Traill. "He stabbed her in a strange fashion, when she was far away at the other end of the garden."

"But he was not there!" cried Catharine. "He was up in this room."

"He was not there when he stabbed her," answered the detective.

"I told Miss Crawford," said the Captain, in a low voice, "that the garden was full of daggers."

"Yes, of green daggers that grow on trees," continued Traill. "You may say if you like that she was killed by a wild creature, tied to the earth but armed."

His morbid fancy in putting things moved in her again her vague feeling of a garden of green mythological monsters.

"He was committing the crime at the moment when you first came into that garden," said Traill. "The crime that he committed with his own hands. You stood in the sunshine and watched him commit it.

"I have told you the deed was done for the drug, but not by the drug. I tell you now it was done with a syringe, but not a hypodermic syringe. It was being done with that ordinary garden implement he was holding in his hand when you saw him first. But the stuff with which he drenched the green rose trees came out of this green bottle."

"He poisoned the roses?" asked Catharine, almost mechanically.

"Yes," said the Captain, "he poisoned the roses. And the thorns."

He had not spoken for some time; but the girl was gazing at him distractedly. Then she said, "And the knife . . . ?"

"That is soon said," answered Traill. "The presence of the knife had nothing to do with it. The absence of the knife had a great deal. The murderer stole it and hid it, partly perhaps with some idea that its loss would look black against the Captain, whom I did in fact suspect, as I think you did. But there was a much more practical reason; the same that had made him steal and hide his wife's scissors. You heard his wife say she always wanted to tear off the roses with her fingers. If there was no instrument to hand, he knew that one fine morning she would. And one fine morning she did."

Catharine left the room without looking again at what lay in the light of the window under the sheet. She had no desire but to leave the room, and leave the house, and above all leave the garden behind her. And when she went out into the road she automatically turned her back on the fringe of fanciful cottages, and set her face toward the open fields and the distant woods of England. And she was already snapping bracken and startling birds with her step before she became conscious of anything incongruous in the fact that Fonblanque was still strolling in her company.

And, as the tales go, it was like the end of the world in that it was the beginning of a better one.

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Charles G. Norris, the famous American novelist, author of such frank and realistic books as SALT, BRASS, *and* BREAD, *was that rare type of writer who, according to his equally famous wife, Kathleen Norris, could put three hours' hard work into composing three sentences; he did all his word-struggling beforehand and seldom changed even a comma afterwards. The recipe for fine writing often includes the slow fermentation of words in the brain long before "the poet's pen turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name."*

"Such tricks hath strong imagination," and who would dream that Charles G. Norris once strung words into the pattern of a detective-crime short story? Yet he did, and for all the story's brevity and casual naturalism, it is one of the most ingenious tales of cardsharping ever to appear in print. Read about a man who held a royal flush in poker — and still lost!

MR. BRIGGS WAS RIGHT

by CHARLES G. NORRIS

IN THE fall of 1922 I was returning via the Overland Limited from New York to San Francisco. In the smoking car on the first morning after leaving Chicago a man across the aisle leaned forward casually and made a comment about the scenery. He appeared to be an agreeable sort of fellow. We fell to talking, and he told me that his name was Cahill — Ira Cahill. He was a peach grower, he said, from Sutter County, California. We discussed the fruit situation, and presently another man joined us whom Mr. Cahill introduced as his partner, Mr. Fitzpatrick.

The miles sped by; we smoked; Mr. Cahill suggested bridge. I am an indifferent player, and I suspected that neither of my chance acquaintances was an expert. I'd be glad to play, I said, for a penny a point, which is my limit, but Cahill preferred half a cent. We looked about for a fourth player. A man across the aisle was reading the *Omaha Bee*. I mustered up courage to ask him if he cared to join us. He looked me over suspiciously, and shook his head.

"I don't play cards with strangers," he said curtly.

It staggered me. Explaining that I was a writer, I fished out a calling card and handed it to him. It happened that he knew of me — had read something of mine — and so he apologized very decently. I introduced him to Mr. Cahill and Mr. Fitzpatrick. He was Charles F. Briggs of Toledo, he informed me.

We sat down, the porter brought cards, and we commenced to play. I found that my chance acquaintances were by no means the poor players I

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had half feared them to be. Briggs played an excellent game, and most of the time I had the good fortune to draw him as a partner.

During the next two days we were together morning, afternoon and evening.

I remember that just after we left Sacramento, Briggs, my partner at the time and dealing, when he had dealt four or five rounds, laid the pack down to light his cigar. Fitzpatrick, on my left, picked up the five cards in front of him and exclaimed with an exasperated "Damn!" that he wished we were playing poker. I glanced at my five cards. They were — the ace, king, queen, jack and ten of spades!

All my life I had heard of the poker hand, the first five cards dealt in a bridge game, on which the canny cardsharp proposes to "bet" and the "come-on" takes him up and is trimmed.

Was I a come-on? The thought flashed through my mind, and my eyes went round the table. The only man who faintly suggested the gambler type was my own partner, Briggs. It was impossible to believe either of the peach growers a crook. Yet I deliberated, after all, they were but train acquaintances. If I was a come-on, why had I been dealt an *unbeatable* hand?

Cautiously I admitted that I too had a good poker hand. Fitzpatrick sniffed and said he wished I would be willing to bet it. Briggs, his cigar lighted, appeared anxious to go on with the deal. Fitzpatrick stopped him.

"No, wait a moment," he said, "if Mr. Norris thinks his hand is good, he may want to back it against mine. I've got five thousand dollars to say I've got him beat." He whipped out his wallet, and to my amazement counted out the money in big bills.

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed. "Do you carry that much money around with you when you're traveling?"

He just happened to have it, he explained.

"Well," I thought to myself, "I'm a come-on all right, but I can't figure their game. How are they going to beat a royal flush?"

"I wouldn't bet five thousand dollars on a single hand of cards, even if I had that much," I said. "I've only got a couple of hundred with me, but at the same time, if I *had* a thousand, I'd be tempted to chance it on this hand."

"Your check is perfectly good," Fitzpatrick assured me. "If you're in earnest, let's put up the money, get the bet settled, and go on with our game."

"Very well," I told him; "if you'll risk my check, I'll risk you haven't got me beat."

"Done." He threw a thousand dollars across the table. "You hold the stakes, Cahill," he said, and I handed my check over to his partner as well.

"Here goes," I said; "it's a showdown. I'll lay down card for card with you." I picked out the ten of spades with the intention of placing it face upward on the table when Cahill put a restraining hand on my arm.

"Look here," he said, "I don't think

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you fellows ought to go on with this. Someone is going to get hurt. Now, what's the use of that? We've had a mighty pleasant time ever since we got together — a time we'll always remember — and I think you're making a big mistake. . . . Let's call the bet off; show your hands down, and go on with the bridge. I know Fitzpatrick can't afford to lose a thousand dollars. Perhaps you can," he said to me, "but I know you aren't going to feel particularly cheerful over it if you do."

I hesitated. Fitzpatrick too was impressed. Briggs joined in:

"Mr. Cahill is perfectly right," he said. "This is all nonsense." He reached over and took the bills from Cahill and shoved them back to Fitzpatrick. Then he laid down his hand and, taking my check, tore it up.

I was immensely relieved. These men were not cardsharpers after all; I had been right in my judgment of them.

Fitzpatrick and I then faced our hands. He exposed a diamond straight flush to the queen. We laughed, and Fitzpatrick said he would like to have me come up to Marysville some time to sit in with his gang.

We settled our bridge score and we parted company in San Francisco with warm handshakes all around.

Two days later I had a statement from my bank: my account was just one thousand dollars short. Cahill, or Briggs, must have palmed my check. The paper torn up before my eyes was a blank check on some other bank.

Mr. Briggs was right. Now when I travel on trains I too — like him — never play cards with strangers.

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A few more thoughts on nomenclature, with particular reference to namesakes among short-story detectives. . . . The surname Rason has also been used twice in short fiction — in Roy Vickers's Department of Dead Ends stories and as the name of Fidelity Dove's adversary. But since the saintly and ethereal lady larcenist was also created by Roy Vickers, we are confronted with the rare (perhaps unique) instance of an author duplicating himself patronymically!

Or, is there another theory to explain two Inspectors named Rason, both the brain-children of a single author? Yes, possibly the Rason of the Department of Dead Ends is the same *Rason who is always "too late with too little" in the Fidelity Dove series. There is no conclusive evidence one way or the other: Rason's connection with the Department of Dead Ends is not mentioned in the book,* THE EXPLOITS OF FIDELITY DOVE, *and Fidelity Dove has not yet tangled with the Department of Dead Ends — although such a battle of crime-versus-detection is something to conjure with!*

You will meet Detective-Inspector Rason again in the utterly fascinating story that follows — another original written especially for your Editor. "The Man Who Was Murdered by a Bed" is one of those forty-three "lucky" successes achieved by Rason in ten years of patient, painstaking pursuing — all cases previously given up as hopeless after the application of orthodox methods of manhunting. Judge for yourself if Rason is, as his colleagues claim, "lucky" — or, as Rason himself says, "a fool kept at Scotland Yard on the principle of setting a fool to catch a fool" — but keep your eye on the dead-end clue that Rason himself hung on to so bull-doggedly — the clue of the flannel petticoat.

THE MAN WHO WAS MURDERED BY A BED

by ROY VICKERS

FROM time to time leading Scotland Yard men would rake over the dust-bin that was the Department of Dead Ends. Complaints would follow of slapdash methods, of files out of date, of frivolous cross-references. They would grumble that Detective-Inspector Rason's most outstanding quality was his luck. Yet, with Rason as caretaker, the Department scored forty-three convictions in ten years — all major crimes in which orthodox

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detection had failed. From these figures we are bound to infer that some logical principle was at work — especially when we remember that scientists (in whom Scotland Yard has faith) agree that the "laws of chance" are an illusion and that the consistently lucky man cannot exist.

Rason himself accepted these criticisms. "Most criminals are fools," he once said. "They keep me on at Dead Ends on the principle of setting a fool to catch a fool." He admitted that he was groggy on detective science and that when he got a "lucky" pointer he generally did the rest by guesswork. Well, it depends what he meant by guesswork. For instance, he would say that he guessed which of the two highly respectable Bexington councillors killed the sordid little gigolo, Emilio Stanza (born Douglas Keen of Clerkenwell, London). Here he ignores his own intelligent research on the clue of the flannel petticoat, a research which consisted of a long conversation, punctuated with giggles, with an elderly woman who had worn one in her twenties. Having an unscientific mind, he was able to believe that the petticoat had been used, not as a red herring, but as a petticoat.

The evidence first established a strong case against Councillor Bentake, then an equally strong case against Councillor Harman. Given that murder can ever be reasonable, each had a reasonable motive for killing the gigolo. Each volunteered evidence against the other in the apparent hope of procuring the other's arrest. In each case the evidence, though given in malice, was truthful. In each case it had the contrary effect of clearing the man it was apparently intended to injure.

The wealth of information, scientifically sifted, produced the exasperating conclusion that no one could possibly have murdered Stanza — that, alone in a seaside bungalow, he had dealt himself a heavy blow on the back of the head and had then committed suicide, by creeping under an iron bedstead and throttling himself with the mechanism regulating the tension of the spring mattress — after covering his head with a flannel petticoat.

Bexington is one of those towns on the South Coast so incredibly featureless and dull that one wonders how it could possibly have become a holiday resort. Viewed from the sea, it appears as a three-mile strip of Victorian buildings, petering out at each end into a cluster of summer bungalows. One hardly needs to be told that the cluster of bungalows at one end of the strip is called West Bungalow Town and that the cluster at the other end is called East Bungalow Town.

Stanza was spending the summer in a bungalow — "Cosy Nook" — in West Bungalow Town. But his body was found in a bungalow — "Inverurie" — in East Bungalow Town.

The kind of bed that was used for the murder is probably unfamiliar to this generation. It consisted of four interlocking iron girders — the main

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frame — with an ornamental superstructure at head and foot. Supported by the main frame were two wooden beams stretching the spring mattress. To adjust the tension of the springs a detachable device like the starting handle of an automobile, working on a worm drive, moved one beam closer to the iron girder at the head of the bed and would thus compress anything placed between the beam and the girder — such as a man's throat. In the Bexington murder a certain economy was exercised; for the detachable device was used to stun the victim before he was thrust under the bed and pulled into a semi-sitting position, his throat between the beam and the girder.

At about eight minutes to six on the afternoon of June 3rd, 1934, an electrician named Wenslow entered the bungalow "Inverurie" in East Bungalow Town, by arrangement, to examine the fittings. As he approached "Inverurie", he noticed what appeared to be a woman of the charwoman type pushing her bicycle over the grass and on to the road; the angle at which she approached the road suggesting that she had come from "Inverurie". He admitted himself with the latchkey which fits all the bungalows — a fact not generally brought to the notice of the tenants. On entering the bungalow he observed that the linoleum was still wet, presumably from the ministrations of the charwoman who, incidentally, had left the radio playing.

"I can't account for what I did then," he testified later, "except that when I switched off the radio and it was suddenly quiet-like, I felt sort of creepy as if there was someone hiding in the bungalow, and I thought I'd have a look around before I started work. I went into the next room and I saw a sort of cover sticking on the bed in a funny way, thrown there, careless-like. I didn't know then it was a petticoat as it didn't look like the petticoats I've seen. I didn't touch it 'cause of that sort of feeling, but I looked under the bed and what I saw gave me a turn. I pulled myself together. I knew I had to move the cover — meaning the petticoat — in case I could do anything to save life, but I saw he was dead and thought I'd better not touch anything. Oo, I forgot — there was smoke in the room — not a lot but enough to make me cough, but I forgot about it as I hurried back to the other room to ring the police."

The police — one of whom identified Stanza — arrived in force at six-fifteen. They brought with them a doctor who was able to assert that death had taken place well within an hour — most probably between about half-past five and six.

There was no fireplace in the bedroom. In the washing basin were ashes of paper, obviously burnt in the basin.

"If the charwoman who was working here this afternoon was the one Wenslow saw getting on her bike, she must have been in here when the crime was committed," said Higgins, the local superintendent. "This bun-

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galow belongs to Councillor Bentake. That means Riglow is the agent — bet your life Bentake wouldn't employ Councillor Harman. Get on to Riglow quick, but don't tell him what's happened."

While his subordinate was telephoning, the superintendent examined that which had covered the head of the corpse.

"I believe it's a woman's petticoat — sure of it!" he exclaimed. "This tape — see? — runs inside this tunnel at the top here. The tape ties it round the waist. Queen Victoria used to wear 'em like that. I expect that char pinched it out of somebody's attic."

Two policemen and the doctor looked with mild interest at this precursor of the underslip. It was of a thick, pink material, subsequently described as a flannel compound known as flannelette. It was observed that about an eighth of the garment was of a pale, uneven pink, while the pinkness of the remainder was strident. It was clean, except round the hem, on which was a small black blur of fresh grease and some road grit; a thorny twig a couple of inches long was clinging to the material.

"It's a new one on me — committing a murder with a bed," remarked Higgins. "Sort of thing only a charwoman would think of! . . . Well, George?"

"Mr. Riglow says that no charwoman has been sent to 'Inverurie', sir. The bungalow is not in the market, as Councillor Bentake is lending it to a personal friend."

"But a char has been working here. The floor's still wet."

The riddle of the washed linoleum was temporarily snowed under in the arrival of Colonel Kimber, Chief Constable of the county, who later installed himself with staff at the Bexington Town Hall. By eight o'clock the staff had done such good work on the ashes that a number of words, mostly of an astonishingly erotic nature, were decipherable.

"Cor, why it's Mr. Bentake's handwriting!" exclaimed Higgins. "I must have seen hundreds of letters in his writing, and I'll swear it's his."

"Is that Bentake the local draper?" asked the Chief Constable.

"Yes sir, but he's more than just a draper. He's a councillor, too."

"In that case," said the Colonel drily, "don't send a couple of men to fetch him here at once. Send him my compliments and tell him that I am in urgent need of his advice."

"Very good, sir!" grinned Higgins. "Cor! Councillor Harman won't half be pleased if Bentake really is in this."

The Bentake-Harman feud was a standing joke in the inner circles of the town.

Bentake had the town's best drapery and furniture emporium and was one of its most substantial tradesmen. Six years ago a rival firm had secured a better site — a site which Bentake and his father before him had tried in vain to purchase. The site had passed through Harman's hands, and Bentake believed that it was spite which had

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inspired Harman to let a rival have it.

When they had first stood for the Council, Harman had opposed Bentake and beaten him. Each man had his finger in a number of local sidelines, and by ill-chance, as it seemed, they were perpetually spoiling each other's little deals.

Then the ridiculous happened. Gladys Bentake came to live with her uncle and aunt; and Harman, who was not yet forty, fell in love with her. She was a gentle, mousey little woman who returned his affection in a Tennysonian sort of way. Bentake had prevailed upon his niece to assert that the engagement was informal — whatever that might mean — and to wait at least six months in order to make sure of her own feelings. Their brother councillors were highly amused and saw to it that Gladys and Harman should not lack joint invitations.

Bentake, though his life must be accounted smooth and successful, was in the habit of making furtive journeys to London under pretext of business, the indirect result of which was that on March 2nd, 1934 — that is, about three months before the summer season opened — Emilio Stanza called on Councillor Bentake.

Stanza collected five hundred pounds in cash for a dozen letters, coarse rather than sentimental, written to a girl in London. As a blackmailer, Stanza was a bit of an oddity: for he handed over six of the twelve letters for the five hundred, promised that he would hand over the balance without further payment in three months' time if Bentake would sponsor him socially for that period, that is, until June 3rd — the day Stanza was murdered. Stanza made this condition because he knew that Bentake's niece, Gladys, who lived with her aunt and uncle, had a small income in her own right and he had heard she was engaged to a local man of substance, though he knew nothing of the feud between Bentake and the fiancé, Harman.

Stanza's manners were passable if somewhat affected, and Bentake felt obliged to accept the terms. Stanza said he wanted a bungalow. At first Bentake was disinclined to help. Then he thought of something.

"The best agent in the town for your purpose is Harman." He added: "Maybe you'll be able to find out something about him which will be in your line of business. I did hear that he had changed his name before he came to this town — some say he's a Frenchman — but I've no proof."

By coordinating the evidence in the light of after events we can assert that Stanza was Spanish in appearance only; that he could speak the language fluently though he had acquired it in England; that he was known to the London police for what he was but had never been convicted. At the age of 35 he looked ten years younger. He had crisp, black, curly hair and long thin hands. He was generally over-dressed and smelt like a coiffeur's salon. In the middle twenties, after failing in various semi-artistic careers, he made the discovery that about one in four of the women he met reacted

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sentimentally to his sexual magnetism — a discovery which he turned, not to pleasure, but to profit.

When Stanza called on Harman, the latter sized him up fairly accurately. Stanza explained that Bentake would give him a reference and Harman guessed that Bentake was being blackmailed; subsequently he verified his guess, in some detail. He decided at once that Stanza should have a bungalow. He installed him in "Cosy Nook", in West Bungalow Town, where he himself owned most of the bungalows. It is characteristic that Bentake had similar holdings in East Bungalow Town.

Harman presented an Agreement and an inventory. In signing them, Harman noticed, Stanza guided his right hand with his left index finger. He would have doubted that the signatures had been made by the same man if he had not actually seen them made.

Stanza gushed over the bungalow. It was charming. So was the sea. "You can have no idea how I love the sea. On my mother's side I am descended from the Emilio Stanza who commanded a galleon in the Armada which was sunk by Drake himself a few miles off what is now Bexington."

Harman, who had already endured a good deal of this sort of thing, was maliciously pleased when the tenant of the next bungalow, who chanced to be a Spaniard, came within hailing distance. Harman promptly introduced them and was taken aback when Stanza opened a conversation in Spanish.

Stanza, aware of his triumph, decided to take a risk.

"How delightful to be able to speak something other than English sometimes!" he drawled. "Perhaps you feel it too? Is not your name an anglicised form?"

It was not difficult for Harman to guess the other's train of thought.

"Save yourself trouble!" he snapped. "I am the grandson of the French General Armand. My father, who came to England when he was seven, became a naturalized Englishman before he married my mother. I did not spread the story when I came here because a change of name handicaps a stranger. But now that I've established myself, I wouldn't care tuppence if you were to shout it all over the town."

Harman had built his business by his own energy and intelligence. He was of medium height, slender, thin-faced — much more the kind of man to plan and carry out a murder than Bentake, who had inherited his business, and was rarely required to use more than his knowledge of the trade and local affairs. Bentake was not fat but fleshy, with a rather fleshy outlook. But he was as scrupulously honest as Harman in his business dealings and well contented with life except when he thought of Harman.

Harman had never really hated Bentake until the latter had told him that, while he could not prevent Gladys from marrying whom she chose, he would do his utmost to persuade her not to marry Harman.

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Harman was a late starter with women. In psychological jargon, he developed a major fixation on this woman, some ten years his junior — in romantic terms, he was deeply in love with her and believed, however erroneously, that life would not be worth living without her.

Now, most normal men can endure the grief of losing to a rival, provided the girl behaves with dignity. But there is a formula that is apt to sting even moderate men to violence, and that formula was stumbled upon by the mousey little Gladys Bentake after Stanza had stimulated her imagination, according to plan.

"I love you as much as ever and I still want to be your wife," she said, in effect, to Harman. "But something I don't understand draws me to Emilio. I know it's mad and wicked and I despise myself. But if he wants me I feel I must give myself to him."

Filed with this is the opinion of a medical psychologist that such a confession would tend to produce a murder-reaction in the recipient. It definitely established a stronger motive for Harman than for Bentake. On the other hand, Bentake ran pretty close. Much as he hated Harman he would rather that Gladys should marry him than that she should have her emotional being shattered by Stanza.

Bentake began by offering Stanza another five hundred to clear out. But Stanza had planned to collect a thousand from each man and, after the girl's marriage, some more from her on account of her letters. Bentake did not increase his offer. Instead, he wrote an incredibly rash letter which was later found by the police.

Mr. Stanza, if my niece's life is spoilt through you it will be my fault — a sin with which I do not purpose to burden my conscience. I shall therefore kill you if you do not remove yourself from her thoughts. You may say that threatened men live long and if that is what you think, heaven help both of us because I mean it and shall give myself up to the police at once, explaining that I have only killed a blackmailer and a souteneur and shall throw myself on the mercy of the court. Henry Bentake.

The hysterical tone carries a certain conviction. At first, the police took the view that threats to kill are quite common but are rarely implemented. On the other hand, statistics showed that in 22 per cent of righteous indignation murders, the slayer begins by intending to give himself up but changes his mind after the deed.

Harman pleaded with the girl without much success.

"If you think I'm prejudiced against this fellow, can't you talk it over with some girl friend you trust?"

"Well, yes, I could," admitted Gladys. "Irma Goff is coming down with her husband the second week in June. But I don't think talking will do much good." She added: "Uncle is letting Irma have 'Inverurie'."

Harman decided to tackle Stanza and went to see him at "Cosy Nook". After ten minutes' sparring, bedrock was reached.

"I quite understand what you want

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and, of course, it can be arranged," said Stanza. "There is a technique in handling this particular situation, Mr. Harman. You put the lady behind a screen or, say, in the next room in one of these bungalows. I am supposed to be unaware that she is listening. You ask me questions — I'll write them out for you. I answer in terms that are quite certain to make the lady feel sick every time my name is mentioned. I will do my part for a thousand pounds."

At the Bexington Town Hall, assisting the Chief Constable in investigating the murder of Emilio Stanza, were two of his own staff, including Miss Florence Lenpile, his niece, and the first woman police officer to attain senior rank. Present also was the local superintendent, Higgins.

"Mr. Bentake, sir," announced the constable on door duty.

"Mr. Bentake, we want you to tell us everything you know about Emilio Stanza, who, I understand, has been a frequent guest at your house."

Bentake registered discomfort.

"A low type — about as low as one can go. I only invited him under pressure. . . . I say, Colonel, has he been murdered?"

"Yes, he has. In a bungalow owned by you, 'Inverurie', at about a quarter of six. I gather that does not surprise you, Mr. Bentake?"

"Not a bit! I'm not even surprised that it was done on my property, because I've a pretty shrewd idea who murdered him, if you can call it murder, and that's George Harman. But Colonel, I *am* surprised he had the courage to do it, and I respect him for it — and I never expected to be able to respect George Harman."

"Shall we discuss Harman later, Mr. Bentake? You were going to tell me what sort of pressure Stanza put on you."

"I was hoping to dodge that," admitted Bentake.

With an uneasy glance at Miss Lenpile, Bentake gave a truthful account of the letters and Stanza's campaign in respect to Gladys Bentake — which brought Harman into it again. The Colonel interrupted by passing him the letter which he had written to Stanza.

"Did you write that letter, Mr. Bentake?"

"Yes. And I meant what I said. That's why I respect Harman. It's a moral act, killing that little rat, though I don't suppose Harman did it for moral reasons."

"If Harman murdered Stanza," said the Chief, "why should he do you the favor of burning the letters you wrote to that girl? They were burnt in the basin at 'Inverurie'."

"I don't know. Unless he was trying to plant the murder on me. By the way, Colonel, am I under suspicion?"

"Well — theoretically, of course, Mr. Bentake. Perhaps you would like to clear things up by detailing your movements today since lunch time."

"That's easy. This morning, I got this letter from Stanza." Before pass-

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ing it to the Chief he read aloud: "'You shall have your letters back for nothing as promised if you will come to 'Cosy Nook' this afternoon at five-thirty. Bring along the cash and I will do all you wish about your niece and never see her again. If I'm not there when you arrive, use your master key and wait for me inside.'"

Bentake continued: "I drew the money — got it in my pocket now. Though it's only about ten minutes' walk from my premises, I left just after five. I went along in what you might call a leisurely manner, not wishing anyone who knew me to see me going there. Well, I knocked and waited a bit and then let myself in. Stanza never turned up. I stayed in that bungalow until a little after seven and then I gave it up."

"Hm! Stanza's letter to you was an open confession of blackmail. It's unusual for a blackmailer to be such a fool."

"Stanza was a fool in spite of his cleverness with women. And anyway he knew I would never prosecute."

"And the handwriting is very peculiar."

"He used to write with both hands at once. That kind of man generally has something wrong with his nervous system."

"Nevertheless, this letter only proves that you were asked to be there at that time. Can you produce any witnesses that you did in fact go to that bungalow at all?"

"Let me see — a telegraph boy came about six, but I didn't answer the door and he dropped the telegram through the slit, so he couldn't have known I was there. As I've told you, I took pains to avoid being seen. Do you suggest, Colonel —?"

"The only thing I suggest, Mr. Bentake, is that you be good enough to wait in this building until I have seen Mr. Harman."

Harman's mental processes were quicker than those of Bentake. He acknowledged the Chief Constable's greeting but did not wait for a question.

"Your being here in force at this time of night, Colonel, means murder. Probably Stanza. And if he was murdered in 'Cosy Nook' between, say, six and seven this evening, I may be able to help you."

(*I did not correct Harman's assumption that the murder was located in 'Cosy Nook', in West Bungalow Town instead of in 'Inverurie', in East Bungalow Town, three miles distant,* reported the Chief Constable. *Throughout this first interview we both spoke as if Stanza had been killed in 'Cosy Nook'.*)

"Go ahead, Mr. Harman."

"To begin with me — I had an appointment with Stanza at five-thirty this afternoon at his bungalow 'Cosy Nook', in West Bungalow Town, which I rented to him. Stanza, as you probably know, was a blackmailer. He was stinging me for a thousand — I'll tell you why later if you want to know. I went there on foot, with the thousand in my pocket." He produced a wallet, displayed a wad of banknotes. "As I approached the

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bungalow I saw ahead of me a brother councillor, Mr. Bentake. I'd better tell you at once he's no friend of mine, though I am engaged to his niece, who is of a totally different mental and moral make-up. Bentake, I happened to know, was also being blackmailed by Stanza. If he was going to Stanza I had no intention of making a party of it. So I took cover by the cistern about fifty yards from 'Cosy Nook'.

"Bentake did go to 'Cosy Nook'. I did not see Stanza open the door, but I saw Bentake go in. I decided to see Stanza myself after Bentake had gone.

"I squatted down by that cistern for a devil of a time. Nothing happened except that a telegraph boy went to 'Cosy Nook' round about six."

"Who opened the door to the boy?"

"I didn't notice — my mind slipped off him. You see, I didn't suspect murder until Bentake came out. I know he came out at ten past seven because the beach warden had been chatting with me and had just asked me the time. He came out in a furtive sort of way, looking about him as if he didn't want to run into anybody. It was the way he walked that roused my suspicion that he might have killed Stanza. I didn't want to be mixed up in it. So I didn't go to 'Cosy Nook'. When I'd given Bentake a start I went home."

"What time did Bentake actually enter the bungalow?"

"I didn't look at my watch."

"Had any of the bungalows near the cistern got the radio on?"

"Oh yes — now I remember! Within a minute of Bentake going in, some radio blared out the Horst Wessel song."

"Horst Wessel! Isn't that the signature tune of those German hot-heads under that fellow Hitler? It seems a very strange thing to play during Children's Hour."

"I can't help it. It *was* the Horst Wessel. Ask the B.B.C."

"I will. Will you be good enough to wait in another room while I do so?"

On the telephone, the British Broadcasting Corporation expressed no surprise at the absurd suggestion that the Horst Wessel song had been played during Children's Hour, but switched the query to the Monitoring Department, which listens to foreign stations. The Chief Constable was informed that this song had been played at five thirty-four on Madrid radio, which was broadcasting a ceremony between the German and Spanish Fascists.

"Madrid! It's the dullest station in Europe!" exclaimed the Colonel.

"The people who've taken the bungalow next door to 'Cosy Nook' are Spanish, sir," said Higgins, the local superintendent. "Stanza has been heard jabbering to them." In a couple of minutes he was speaking to them and elicited that between five and six they had been tuned in to Madrid.

"Then let us assume that Harman is telling the truth. His evidence provides a perfect alibi for Bentake."

"And Bentake's evidence provides a perfect alibi for Harman, sir," said his aide. "Each establishes that the

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ther was in West Bungalow Town — hree miles away from the murder — t five forty-five. Suppose they're in onspiracy? They've each got a strong notive. The enmity may be a bluff."

"Bring Bentake back," ordered the Chief. "And all of you watch him. I'm going to spring it on him."

When Bentake came in he looked a hanged man. His former confidence had vanished.

"Mr. Bentake," said the Chief. 'You realize that you have been detained because you were unable to produce a witness. In the meantime we have produced a witness ourselves who has confirmed your statement in every essential particular. It only remains to thank you for answering my questions so frankly."

With an explosive sigh Bentake sat down on the Chief's own table. "That's a relief!" he panted. "Why, when I was — waiting in the other room — I saw myself in the dock. Saw a play like that once, in which a perfectly innocent man — oh sorry, Colonel!" He got off the table. His self-complacency had returned.

"That's all right, Mr. Bentake. It so happens that Councillor Harman was watching the bungalow when you entered and watched until you came out."

"*What!* How can Harman have seen me in *West* Bungalow Town at a quarter to six when he was three miles away in *East* Bungalow Town killing Stanza?"

"It was your assumption that he killed Stanza, not mine."

"And it's still my assumption, Colonel. Why — don't you see! — by telling you he was watching me he leads you to believe he couldn't have been in East Bungalow Town."

"My dear fellow, you're trying to destroy your own alibi. You'd really better go home now. Good night."

All agreed with the Chief that Bentake had reacted as an innocent man. And Bentake's innocence connoted Harman's innocence — which was irritating, because it meant dropping two suspects, each with a gilt-edged motive.

"Call Harman back," ordered the Chief. When the latter re-appeared: "Mr. Harman, do you know a bungalow called 'Inverurie' in East Bungalow Town?"

"Yes. It's the end one — the eastern end. Owned by Bentake."

"At a quarter to six approximately, this afternoon, Stanza was murdered in that bungalow — 'Inverurie', in East Bungalow Town — not in 'Cosy Nook' in West Bungalow Town, as you seemed to suppose."

Harman said nothing for several seconds. Uninvited he sat down. "That means," he said with extreme wretchedness, "that Bentake could not possibly have killed Stanza. My dislike of the man distorted my judgment or I'd have realized that he hasn't the guts." He got up. "I don't see how I can help you, Colonel."

"Before you go you might give me your movements during the earlier part of the afternoon up to five-thirty, so that I can get this buttoned

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up: mention any contacts to facilitate a check up."

"Lunched at the club. Office until four when I went to a house which is partly mine — Six, Bolsover Street, just by the station. A tenant is coming in on the fifteenth and I wanted to take some measurements for a spot of decoration. I left about five-fifteen. Oh — contacts. A young salesman from Telfort's, the decorators. No other contacts until after seven — the beach warden I mentioned."

By the end of the following morning the town, the whole county, had been combed for the charwoman seen leaving "Inverurie" by Wenslow, the electrician, but without result. The inquest on Stanza elicited no new facts but sharpened the old ones. The beach warden at East Bungalow Town had seen a woman enter "Inverurie" at about five — and had seen a man, obviously Stanza, walking towards "Inverurie" about half an hour later. Questioned about the woman he said he assumed she was a charwoman, that she was wearing a bonnet and shawl and was pushing a bicycle over the rough ground from the road to the bungalow. She seemed to handle the bicycle awkwardly; the pedal caught her skirt and he observed a pink underskirt. He could not say whether it was the petticoat exhibited, because he was at least a dozen yards away. He was certain that, between five and five forty-five, when he finished a simple repairing job on an adjacent bungalow, no other person entered or left "Inverurie".

After the Coroner's court had returned a verdict of murder against person or persons unknown, Colonel Kimber announced that he intended to call in Scotland Yard.

His colleagues looked at him in disappointment at this confession of weakness.

"Our only two suspects have kicked each other out of the case. Each has provided the other with a cast-iron alibi. The alibi could only be shaken if we could prove conspiracy — which we cannot.

"Stanza, we know, was entering 'Inverurie' at five-thirty — the exact time of his appointment with Bentake in West Bungalow Town, three miles away. We have no evidence as to why he went to that untenanted bungalow. As to the letter in which he asks Bentake to go to 'Cosy Nook', the experts return a negative report. They will not say it is a forgery, though they admit dissimilarities, but add that the handwriting was normally so erratic that they can come to no definite conclusion.

"There remains the very shadowy figure of this charwoman. The electrician Wenslow's description of the woman he saw within fifty yards of 'Inverurie' and the beach warden's description roughly, but only roughly, correspond. We cannot say that the women are the same woman and it wouldn't matter if we could."

"But surely the petticoat is the pivot of the whole case!" protested Miss Lenpile.

"We must not let ourselves be

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smothered in that petticoat," said the Colonel patiently. "If you — er — attach it to that shadowy charwoman you reach absurdity. She goes to 'Inverurie' in order to murder Stanza. Finding she has a little time on her hands she decides out of pure kindness to the owner, who is unknown to her, to wash his floor for him. Having duly murdered Stanza, our charwoman removes the — er — garment from her person in order, not to conceal the body, but merely to cover its face. There were coverlets, towels and what-not in the bungalow which would have served the superfluous purpose of covering the face.

"Alternatively, the murderer — charwoman or any other woman, or man in make-up, for there must be a number of persons who had a strong motive for killing this blackmailer — the murderer carries this remarkable garment to the scene of the crime. For what purpose? As a red herring? But it does not draw us off anybody's scent, and could not do so. If the murderer — as is most probable owing to the physical strength required — was a man, he could not hope that we should infer that it must have been done by a woman, solely on the strength of that ridiculous petticoat. Nor, if we could connect any woman with the case, would that petticoat draw suspicion from that woman."

"Which all proves that the petticoat wasn't there — and it *was* there!" snapped Miss Lenpile.

Gladys Bentake's friend, Irma Goff, was not able to have "Inverurie" for the summer holiday because Scotland Yard, working on accepted lines, rented it for the season and sealed it up, preserving everything untouched. They had a Team A working on the assumption of Bentake's guilt, a Team B on the assumption of Harman's guilt, a Team C on the assumption of conspiracy. The assumptions remained assumptions.

The flannel petticoat was dismissed as irrelevant — it was as if the Heads decided that it had no right to be there. Yet the petticoat represented the solitary item of information contributed by scientific detection. For analysis established that it was made of an inflammable flannelette, the manufacture and sale of which was prohibited by law in 1899; that the oily smear was of such a nature that it might have come from a bicycle; that the thorny twig might have been picked up from the rough, grassy ground between "Inverurie" and the road; and that the unevenness of the color was due to only part of the petticoat having been exposed for a number of years not to direct sunlight, but to a north light. The microscope also revealed traces of metal polish on the inner side of the garment.

The dragnet went out through London, through the whole of Britain, scooping in every victim of Stanza's, every ascertainable contact, without producing a single man or woman who could have played the part of the shadowy charwoman seen to enter and leave "Inverurie" at the vital times.

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A riddle that remained unsolved was why Stanza had gone to "Inverurie". A week after the inquest, when Harman eloped with Gladys Bentake, Team B started the theory that he was marrying her to shut her mouth — that she had been used to entice Stanza to the bungalow which had, in effect, been placed at her disposal. But Team C rejected this angle of conspiracy because Gladys Bentake was not only mousey but, if truth be told, a rather silly little woman.

The sudden elopement seems to have resulted from a conversation over morning coffee in the Golden Cockerel Tea Rooms, where they habitually met. Gladys records it in her diary with a wealth of soliloquy. Her first words were:

"Why did poor Emilio go to 'Inverurie'? And why at half-past five?"

"I don't know," answered Harman. "I expect the police will find out in due course. Must you call him 'poor Emilio'? You must know now what sort of man he was."

She whimpered at him and there followed a short quarrel with a swift reconciliation in which she promised to marry him as soon as he could arrange the ceremony. With the summer season about to break, a honeymoon meant a considerable financial loss to Harman. He would lose almost as much as if he had bought Stanza off. But he seems to have had no regrets. Under the drive of his major obsession with this colorless little woman he abandoned himself to the happy task of effacing the gigolo from her emotional memory. His success was immediate. But to hear her acknowledge it in words was necessary to the inflation of his personality.

"You don't ever wish you were with Stanza instead of me?" he asked somewhat fatuously.

"Oh, no! I never used to think about him when he wasn't there. I suppose it was his voice or something that made me so silly. I'd never have run away with him *really*."

Harman blinked, and in that single moment the major obsession was cured. But it had cost him too much for him to be able to drop it lightly. He protracted his honeymoon by several weeks while he adjusted his thoughts. He had married a docile little woman with very little sense and not a great deal of character. He would humor her and make the best of it.

In the second week in September, just before they were going home, she was chattering about the kind of social life they would lead, revealing that she was a narrow little snob. He laughed and tossed her a letter forwarded that morning. It was in French and she could not understand it in spite of her genteel education.

"It means, my dear, that we are going to entertain a Minister of State — you've got the whole of Bexington beaten at the start. The French Minister of War is my cousin, though I've never seen him. We have a common grandfather in General Armand — a grand old boy who scuppered three German divisions in the Franco-Prussian war. I have his uniform."

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When they got home he took her p to the attic, filled with furniture hat was not old but out of date. In a ilapidated mid-nineteenth century ardrobe was the General's uniform estooned with medals, which Gladys aid needed polishing.

This happened in the same week n which Scotland Yard relaxed on he Stanza case and passed the flannel etticoat, Stanza's letter to Bentake, nd other oddments to the Depart- nent of Dead Ends.

Detective Inspector Rason read the eport and, in any conscious sense, forgot it. Dead Ends, by its very na- ture, was not required to initiate investigation but to hold its real and documentary evidence against the off chance of its ever being wanted. Sub- sequently, the Yard ungenerously maintained that it was a triple off- chance that enabled Rason to solve the mystery of the petticoat.

On September 20th, he read in *The Daily Mail* that the French War Minister, M. Armand, had arrived in London the previous day to attend the Naval Conference during the fol- lowing week, that he was taking a few days' holiday and intended to visit connections living at Bexington.

"That means Miss Walters is at the Savoy!" exclaimed Rason. In the Mer- rowfield case he had been the means of clearing her brother from suspicion, and she regarded him with warm af- fection, though she was nearly forty years older than he. She had been governess to the French Minister and later to his children and had stayed on in his household in some undefined capacity.

While they were having tea in her two-roomed suite at the Savoy, the page-boy appeared. She went into the adjoining room and returned with a ball dress on a hanger. The upper part of the dress was concealed under a cover, which caught Rason's eye.

"Forgive me for asking — that cover on that dress you gave to the boy — tied with tape at the top. What was it?"

"If you *must* know," answered Miss Walters, with the suggestion of a simper, "it was an old flannel petti- coat. They're excellent as covers, be- ing practically imperishable."

The French Minister goes to Bex- ington — the scene of the flannel pet- ticoat murder. The French Minister's friend happens to produce a flannel petticoat. A totally illogical associa- tion of ideas. Yet this sort of thing had happened before in the Department of Dead Ends.

"They must have been pretty ghastly to wear?" suggested Rason. "Weren't they very hot and heavy?"

"At the time they didn't seem to be. But they were a nuisance."

"Why a nuisance?"

"I'm not going to tell you." Miss Walters was being definitely arch. "I'm not modern, and I wasn't brought up to discuss my underclothing with my male friends."

Rason changed tactics.

"Miss Walters, will you help me in my professional work by telling me

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everything you can about flannel petticoats — particularly why they were a nuisance."

The archness vanished at the appeal of friendship. "A long tape issued from an opening at the back. You crossed the tape behind you and tied it in front. And if you didn't tie it very carefully it was likely to come untied, especially if you exerted yourself. And then the wretched thing would begin to slip down. Sometimes you could grab it through your skirt and hobble to some safe place. Sometimes you couldn't and it would drape itself round your ankles. Then you'd have to pick it up in front of everybody and carry it."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Rason. "And once you had taken it off, could you put it back with your dress still on?"

Miss Walters glared at him and took a deep breath. "It would depend on the kind of corsets you were wearing. At best, it would be a lengthy and troublesome process."

"Thanks — very — *much!*" said Rason.

He did nothing about it until nearly midnight, when he dug out a friend on a daily newspaper and obtained permission to look at the Agency reports of the French Minister's visit to Bexington. There was a great deal of it, only a tiny fraction of which would be used by the main dailies. *Mr. Harman and I have a common grandfather in General Armand who destroyed three Prussian divisions in the Franco-Prussian War. The General left his uniform to his eldest son, Mr. Harman's father, and Mr. Harman has very generously ac ceded to my request to present it throug myself to our national museum.*

The next day he was at Bexingto where he unblushingly described him self as a representative of *The Times* Gladys showed him the wardrob where the uniform had been stored fo so many years, let him poke abou among the furniture. While so doing he turned the conversation to Stanza and gave her to understand that police and Press knew a great deal that could not be published.

He could see at once that the silly little woman was burning to ask him something. He kept talking — watched her nerving herself, sensed that her question would reveal a new angle.

"Do the newspapers know — that is, I've often wondered — though you'll think it's a funny question — does *anybody* know why Emilio Stanza went to the bungalow at that time?"

Rason took a shot in the dark.

"He thought he was going to meet a woman."

As she caught her breath, he knew that there was a woman in it. Direct attack always paid. "If you had kept that appointment, Mrs. Harman, he would have been alive now."

"It was *not* an appointment!" she gasped on a sob. "I refused to go, and there was lots of time to tell him I wasn't going. I refused in the middle of the morning — of the day before it happened. Directly George asked me — we were having morning coffee — I said at once I wouldn't. I don't see that I am to blame."

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"Of course not! But we can't figure ut why you did refuse."

"I knew poor Emilio — Mr. Stanza — wasn't a good man. But it seemed o mean to hide and eavesdrop while e gave himself away."

After some rather random investigation of his own, Rason persuaded is chief to meet him in Bexington the ollowing evening with a couple of ssistants. They went to the bungalow n which Stanza had been murdered. Rason turned on the radio.

A quarter of an hour later, while he two assistants waited in the taxi, Superintendent Karslake and Rason were being shown by a parlormaid nto Harman's sitting room. Against is better judgment Karslake had greed to give Rason a free hand — and bitterly regretted it as Rason whipped out the pink flannel petticoat, slipped it over his head and tied it with a bow round his middle. As Harman's footsteps approached, Rason began to whistle very loudly the Horst Wessel song.

The whistling, the clownish masquerade with the petticoat, acted like a bomb on Harman's nervous system.

"Know that tune, Mr. Harman? But of course you do! It's the jolly old Horst Wessel — the one you told the local police you'd heard on the radio. That was your Fatal Slip, old man. Never mind that — look here!"

Between thumb and finger he took one end of the tape, very slowly loosened the bow. The petticoat fell.

"If I had a skirt on," said Rason, "it would be one hell of a job to put this dainty bit o' lingerie back where the boys couldn't see it. So what do I do? I pick it up, step out of it — like this. And if there's something in the room I don't particularly want to look at, I lob it — like this." He lobbed the petticoat over the back of a chair.

Harman found his voice. "What does this extraordinary behavior mean?"

"It means we've come to arrest you for the murder of Stanza. Before we take you away you may like to tell us whether Bentake was in it with you. Did you burn his letters by agreement — or as an act of generosity to a man you didn't like?"

"I simply don't know what you're talking about!" faltered Harman.

"Of course, that's the obvious thing to say! But did you know that — in the bungalow 'Inverurie' — you left the radio tuned in to Madrid?"

Harman's face hardened.

"Now look here, Mr. Harman, we know you aren't the ordinary criminal, and perhaps you'll clear Bentake if we break all the regulations and put our cards on the table.

"Listen. You intended to buy Stanza off, using the trick these men generally use. The girl is concealed, thinking the gigolo doesn't know she's there. The gigolo then says what he's paid to say and the girl is disgusted. You arranged for this to be done in 'Inverurie' as Miss Bentake, as she was then, had been given the use of it. You took the lady's consent for granted. She upset your plans by refusing — over morning coffee on June 2nd. But you let Stanza go on thinking she

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would be at 'Inverurie' at five-thirty, because you decided to murder him.

"You were up against time. You wanted female clothing. You had some in your attic in that deal chest. I saw it. It may have been the very stuff you used — we can't prove it. You needed a petticoat to make the skirt hang properly. *You took the old flannel petticoat that had covered the General's uniform for years* — in that wardrobe with the cracked panel through which the north light filtered and faded part of the petticoat. Some of the metal polish you used on the medals was found on the petticoat.

"Come to the afternoon of the murder. When the decorator's salesman had left the house in Bolsover Street, you put on your make-up as a mannish-looking charwoman, including the petticoat. You bicycled to 'Inverurie' and at once tuned in the radio to Madrid. You were apparently a charwoman washing the linoleum when Stanza appeared — that gave you a chance to attack him unawares with the bed-crank. He arrived just about the time the radio was playing the Horst Wessel song — five thirty-four. At some point during the murder that petticoat came untied and you took it off and threw it over the head of the victim. You then cycled back, reentered the house in Bolsover Street, and removed your make-up. You were pretty safe by that time. A person had been seen to enter and leave the bungalow at the vital times. But that person had vanished from the earth when you took those clothes off. You planted your murder on an imaginary charwoman, on a stage character created by yourself. As to the telegraph boy, you took only a mild risk, for you knew that Stanza always received a tipster's wire about that time for the next day's racing."

Rason paused for effect, convinced from Harman's demeanor that his reconstruction was accurate.

"So, you see, we know pretty well all that happened, Mr. Harman. The one thing we want to know is whether Bentake agreed with you to go to 'Cosy Nook' and fix the double alibi or whether you forged Stanza's writing — it was easy enough to imitate."

"You can leave Bentake out," snapped Harman. "He would just have dithered with funk if I had asked him to help — the man hasn't the pluck of a rabbit. He was much more useful as an innocent witness. I forged that letter. They won't hang me for killing that rat. They'll put me in prison — for doing a public service in the wrong way."

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Suppose *you* had received this anonymous note, scrawled in blood-red crayon:

"DON'T GO TO THE GLADSTONES'. YOU'LL BE SORRY IF YOU DO!"

Kate Archer DID receive it. But she DID go. And she WAS sorry!

Scarcely had she arrived when one member of the family, a stunning platinum blonde, vanished into thin air. Then, a few hours later, a puppy laid at Kate's feet a horrible, bloody clue—*a platinum blonde scalp lock.*

By this time your *own* scalp will begin to tingle nervously. But this is only the beginning. DON'T miss this definitely unusual murder puzzle—or *YOU'LL* BE SORRY!

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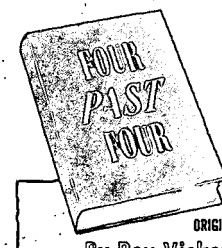
How was I to know that Love meant Death?—she thought to herself in terror. What is wrong? Why do I want a divorce, after only a year of married life with "the catch of the town"? Is my husband going insane—*or am I?*

Why does my handsome, aristocratic husband laugh at my deepest feelings—a scornful laugh that curdles my blood? Why was *I* blamed for the horrible death of that poor little dog? Why did that blonde girl have to die—and what was the meaning of the *Roman coin* found tucked in her bodice? *What sinister force is subtly wrecking my life?*

An off-the-beaten path murder mixup that will have you shivering between the sheets until the wee hours!



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